Shifting Terrain: Landscape, Ecology and Environmental Theater

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ABSTRACT

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"Shifting Terrain" is about the theater's potential to offer crucial resources to resist ecological crisis. Despite the efforts of a number of theorists over the past twenty years, ecocritical theater, which draws upon ecological language and concepts, has failed to thrive in part because it lacks a cohesive, discursive framework to organize its ideas. This dissertation seeks to define the goals of this nascent ecocritical theater along topical, discursive and formal lines by establishing two distinct ecocritical genres: landscape theater and ecology theater.

Theater theorists have argued that, formally and ideologically, landscape and ecology are roughly synonymous. In the first half of "Shifting Terrain," however, I argue that landscape resists ecological concerns, contributing to anthropocentric attitudes by delineating the natural world from humans and the theater they make. Using Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind* (1890), Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1895) and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1949) as examples, I argue that landscape theater performs nature as a framed, aesthetic creation in order to criticize the "ruptures" between humans and the ecosystem generated, at times, by the theater itself. Conversely, through readings of ecologically oriented plays including Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882), Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) and Heiner Müller's *Despoiled Shore / Medeamaterial / Landscape with Argonauts* (1982/83), I argue that ecology theater seeks connections between ecosystems, their inhabitants and the theater, pointing beyond the theatrical frame, physical or conceptual, to the ecosphere.

In the latter half of the dissertation, I investigate the genres of landscape theater and ecology theater in the context of environmental or, more specifically, immersive staging. I first challenge the notion that immersive staging inherently resists the aesthetic distance between theatrical worlds and the ecosphere, using productions of Maria Irene Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977) and Punchdrunk Theatrical Experiences' *Sleep No More* (2011). Both performances surround their audiences with rich environments, but they are also insular, engaging only the synthetic spaces created by performers and designers. Then, I examine the ways in which the outdoor, immersive productions of Robert Wilson's *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE* (1972) and Big House Theater's *Across* (2000) apply ecological ideals by emphasizing theater's capacity to make direct contact with the ecosystems the plays present. No production entirely eliminates the theater's mimetic division from the surrounding world, but performances such as *KA MOUNTAIN* and *Across* represent significant movement toward limiting the aesthetic distance between audiences, worlds of performance and the world itself.

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Finally, this dissertation would never have been completed without my mother Peggy Shafer, who offered her help and support in hundreds of ways over the last several years and well beyond. I offer her my love and my deepest thanks.

DEDICATION

In memory of

Hiroshi Iwasaki

and

William L. Rauch

Introduction:

Theatrum Mundi

Ecological victory will require a transvaluation so profound as to be nearly unimaginable at present. And in this the arts and humanities—including the theater—must play a role.

—Una Chaudhuri, "There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake"[1]

The evolution of ancient Greek and Roman theatrical architecture and scenography provides a useful illustration of the ecocritical theater this dissertation explores. Situated first in the Athenian Agora and later on the southwestern slope of the Acropolis, the Theater of Dionysus was among the first formal theatrical spaces in the West.[2] It helped to establish, along with other Greek theaters, the frontal orientation of the stage relative to the audience, still the most traditional staging arrangement today. But in contrast to many contemporary performances, the City Dionysia was an outdoor affair. Arnold Aronson paints a vivid picture of this scene:

> Unlike our modern experience of theater, in which we sit enclosed in darkness peering into an artificially illuminated box, the ancient Greeks sat in the bright Mediterranean morning sun in springtime watching mythological stories being reenacted against the glorious background of the landscape that was for them the center of the universe.[3]

One can imagine, as Aronson describes, the gathered citizens of Athens celebrating the Festival of Dionysus, looking down at the comedies and tragedies played before them and

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[1] Una Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be A Lot of Fish in that Lake': Toward an Ecological Theater," *Theater* 25:1 (Spring/Summer 1994), 25.

[2] Richard Beacham, "Playing Places: the temporary and the permanent," *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*, Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 205.

[3] Arnold Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 55.

out at the ecosystem that encompassed Athens and the theater itself.[4] The "center of the universe" the Athenians beheld was this ecosystem, from the Greek root "*oikos*," meaning "home."[5]

The theater historian David Wiles suggests that in its earliest incarnation, probably at the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E., the Theater of Dionysus on the Acropolis was a "flexible environment lending itself to creative innovation" made all the "richer for its lack of a finished architectural frame."[6] Richard Beacham observes that "[the Greek] audience was seated, probably initially upon the bare incline of the hill," in direct contact with the land that also framed and infused the theatrical spectacle, before wooden and, eventually, stone benches were added to the space.[7] As the Theater of Dionysus continued to develop over the course of the century, the *skênê* house—first a temporary apparatus, likely made of wood and canvas, and then a permanent structure of stone—was added to the back of the *orchêstra* or playing area.[8] During the Hellenistic period, the *skênê* grew to be approximately a story tall, creating an even more ordered performance space, particularly in contrast with the "flexible environment" of its earlier phases, but preserving the view of the Athenian landscape and with it some sense of

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[4] David Wiles adds, "In the theatre the audience looked down not upon their immediate civic environment but upon the sanctuary of the god, and upon the mountains and sky beyond. The function of theatre was to take citizens away from immediate political issues in order to explore the wider moral and religious context of those issues, and to view the human being outside the context of civilization." *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 36.

[5] Aronson accurately uses the term "landscape" to describe the Greek audience's view of Athens and its surrounds; yet the "place" landscapes offer up as an image is an ecosystem. This distinction will become even more significant later in this chapter. Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss,* 55.

[6] Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 62.

[7] Beacham, "Playing Places: the temporary and the permanent," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*, 205.

[8] Ibid.

access to the "natural" world.[9] During this time, Wiles explains, the actors "stood as if in relief on a narrow stage," moving away from the orchestra and toward the back of the playing area.[10] The "empty space of the orchestral circle," he argues, "created aesthetic distance" further distinguishing the performers from the audience and with this, perhaps, the world of the theater from the natural world.[11] The Greeks may have witnessed the dramas before them in the contexts of the city and the natural environment, but a process of framing, which would yield this "aesthetic distance," was underway as well, particularly by the time of the Hellenistic era.[12]

When the Romans began to construct their own theaters, they embraced the *skênê*, a relatively minor visual obstruction in the Greek theater, with gusto. The Theater of Pompey—which was "Rome's first permanent theater," built in 55 B.C.—was essentially enclosed on all sides, with a three-story *scaena*, the Latin equivalent of *skênê*, and *vela* or awnings that blocked all or part of the sky over the *cavea*, the theater's auditorium.[13] What resulted was an insular performance space closed off from the surrounding world. At the same time, the dynamics of Roman performance were marked by "physical

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[9] David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 181. See also Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning*, 62. I have applied scare quotes here to note the instability of the term "nature." I address the definition of "nature" in greater detail later in this introduction not as a term denoting the organic, for instance, but as a term naming the non-human as part of a false dichotomy among humanity, flora and other fauna.

[10] Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, 211.

[11] Ibid., 211-12. The ecologist Max Oelschlaeger argues that "the Greek mind—arising in the context of agriculture—views culture as an achievement that separates human enterprise from the rest of nature," an observation that may shed additional light on the gradual distinction Greeks made between humans and "nature" over time." See Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 59.

[12] Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, 212.

[13] Beacham, "Playing Places: the temporary and the permanent," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre,* 202, 217-219, 221-22.

convergence" as Roman actors were free to perform in close proximity to the audience, especially as compared with the relative distance of Greek actors. "The high stage wall of the Roman theatre," Wiles argues, "communicated a sense of the invisible" because it barred any view of the world beyond—including Rome and its surrounding ecosystem.[14]

Wiles correlates the contrasting architecture of ancient Greek and Roman theaters to a set of general principles indicative of the ethos of each civilization. The openness of the Greek theater indicates "Greek sensitivity to landscape" while the enclosed Roman theater and its "contained spatial system" reveals Rome's "determination to dominate nature."[15] But complicating this claim is the fact that, as early as the Hellenistic era, the Athenian audience faced a stage and a theatrical performance from which it was physically distanced. Derrick De Kerckhove explains:

> [T]he theater of Athens was a place where under the gaze of the public, practical, physical space and a theoretical one, that of the stage, coincided. Assuming that the spectators were gradually being deprived of a direct and immediate sensory involvement with the action, and that their response was being rechanneled in a visually dominant synthesis, then it follows that their ordinary environmental references were being gradually emptied of their content and that a new spatial condition was being created for them. It was a neutral, abstract container for a programmed experience, a spectacle.[16]

Even with the ecosystem of Athens and its surrounds open to the view of the Greek audience from the *theatron*, the open-air equivalent of the modern-day auditorium, De Kerckhove offers a reminder that the context of the Athenians' surroundings began to change amid the rigors of an emergent spectatorship. Rather than experiencing a visceral

[14] Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, 184.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Derrick De Kerckhove, "A Theory of Greek Tragedy," *SubStance* 9:4 (1980), 27.

awareness of the ecosystem, audiences looked upon—but did not otherwise engage—the terrain of their home during performances. The ancient Greeks, in other words, experienced the ecosystem as what Aronson aptly calls a "landscape," the visual experience of terrain rather than the terrain itself. Beacham and Wiles also note that, aided in part by scenic paintings—Wiles insists these were schematic rather than representational or pictorial, while Beacham claims these paintings depicted specific scenes—Athenians experienced the theatrical world unfolding before them as a "mental *scenescape*" comprised of a variety of natural and aestheticized elements but, crucially, synthesized into a singular, cohesive experience by the audience's own powers of perception.[17] The formation of theatrical spectatorship had begun.

We do not—and may never—know exactly why the Greeks decided to build a *skênê* house or the Romans enclosed theaters like the Theater of Pompey, creating a theatrical structure that would, over centuries, encompass what Aronson calls "hermetic world[s]" on darkened stages still predominant in contemporary Western theater.[18] But we do know something about the effects these increasingly enclosed structures had on the evolution of Western theater; if ecocritics are correct, we also know something about the effect the Roman theater's walls had on the attitudes of many humans toward their places in the world. By shutting out the everyday, both literally and symbolically, humans not only freed themselves to create worlds that reflected the world beyond the *scaena*, but

[17] Beacham, "Playing Places: the temporary and the permanent" in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*, 206, 210. Wiles elaborates on the matter of scene-painting, saying, "The purpose of scene-painting was to create out of transient materials the illusion of a stone monument, in accordance with Dionysus' nature as god of illusion and transformation. There can be no question of a representational set, picturing a background appropriate to a specific play. In simple practical terms, it would have been cumbersome to have changed sets between plays. There is no evidence in the art of the period for pictorial backgrounds." *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning*, 161-62.

[18] Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss*, 40.

also to fashion any kind of worlds they might envision. On the one hand, this sort of creative power may have influenced an audience's sense of the potential to command the world outside of the theater, even as Rome's anthropocentric desire to control nature shaped the theaters it built.[19] On the other hand, audiences and theatermakers also chose to box themselves in, separating the theater and themselves from the unwieldy world of plants and animals—in short, the ecosystem—outside. From the "flexible environment" of the early Greek theater, to the "aesthetic distance" of Hellenistic performance, to the controlled insularity of the Roman stage—all of which continue to influence Western theater today—the relationship between the ecosystem and the theater was and remains one of often fraught extremes, ranging from ecosystemic immersion to anthropocentric isolation.

This dissertation is about the potential for the theater to offer crucial resources to save the planet from ecological crisis by resisting the very same anthropocentric ideals that the theater itself has helped to generate. In 1994, some 2,400 years after the Greeks took the first steps toward barricading the stage, Una Chaudhuri issued what still stands as the most significant critical contribution to the creation of an ecocritical theater: a call to action directing theater scholars and practitioners to search for a "useful ecological theater" that would examine and, subsequently, attempt to diminish the "rupture between human beings and their natural environments."[20] Theater is a source of ecological disconnection, she claims, an "ecopathology" that perpetuates the dichotomy between

[19] Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, 184.

[20] Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 25, 28.

humankind and nature.[21] Chaudhuri insists, however, that by identifying the loci of these ruptures, apparent in genres ranging from naturalism and realism to broad swaths of modernism and beyond, theater might "become the site of a much-needed ecological consciousness."[22]

Curiously, however, the project that Chaudhuri names, an ecology theater, and the critical analyses she points to serve different purposes. "The theater's complicity with the anti-ecological humanist tradition has to be of critical concern to us," she insists, "but we should not overlook the same theater's own self-reflexive stagings of this complicity."[23] To this end, her readings of both Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* and Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* emphasize the rupture between depictions of natural space and the reality of the ecosphere, with both plays approaching a subtle metatheatrical awareness of their own problematic engagements with the natural world.[24] With *The Seagull,* Chaudhuri reads Trigorin's disconnected comments about the play he has just watched and the lake that served as its backdrop—"[…] the scenery was beautiful. *Pause*. There must be a lot of fish in that lake"—as "non sequiturs" indicative of the ruptures between humans and

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[21] The term "ecopathology" is used in both ecocritical and scientific contexts, meaning, in the latter, "the influence of environment on disease." NCBI/NLM/NIH (from *Spore* February, 1994). My use of the term in an ecocritical context draws upon Chaudhuri's "geopathology," which she defines as "[t]he problem of place–and place *as problem*" that "appear[s] as a series of ruptures and displacements in various orders of location, from the micro- to the macrospatial, from home to nature, with intermediary space concepts such as neighborhood, hometown, community, and country ranged in between." Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 55-56.
The ecological concerns Chaudhuri proposes in her earlier work, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" (1994), appear in extended form in *Staging Place* figured as a subcategory of the broader issue of spatial dislocation in both topical and formal contexts. Ecopathology, as it appears here, is a subcategory of geopathological concerns.

[22] Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater,* 28.

[23] Ibid. Here, Chaudhuri uses "humanist" interchangeably with "anthropocentric."

[24] I use the term "natural" to denote the deliberate dichotomy between the human and non-human I argue is contained inherently within "landscape."

nature.[25] She argues regarding the Ekdal loft—an indoor habitat created, in part, for the namesake of *The Wild Duck*—that "To re-literalize the loft is to read it as a representation only—and precisely—of the wilderness. The loft is a reproduction, a copy […]," which motivates Chaudhuri to ask, "What does representation—the fact itself of mimesis, of mediation—do to the meaning of nature?" Finally, she determines that "The Ekdal loft is not a symbolic but a symptomatic space, in which, as in the modern world itself, the categories of nature and artifice collide and distort one other."[26] This reading offers valuable insight into the troubling anthropocentrism that ecology resists, but is neither named by ecology nor describes the potential for positive relations between the ecosystem and the theater.

Twenty more years have passed since Chaudhuri's groundbreaking declaration, but, despite the contributions of a handful of theater ecocritics, "we are still," to borrow the words of Erika Munk and Chaudhuri herself, working "toward" an ecological theater.[27] Although a number of theater scholars—most notably, Elinor Fuchs, Bonnie

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[25] Anton Chekhov quoted in Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 25-26.

[26] Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake'" in *Theater*, 30.

[27] See Chaudhuri's article title, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake': *Toward* an Ecological Theater" [my emphasis] and Erika Munk's "A Beginning and an End," *Theater* 25:1 (Spring/Summer 1994), 5. See also Chaudhuri, *Staging Place.* Over a decade later, Theresa May twice addressed what she calls a "thin" response to Chaudhuri's and Munk's rally cries for an ecocritical theater. Theresa J. May, "Beyond Bambi: Toward a Dangerous Ecocriticism in Theatre Studies," *Theatre Topics* 17:2 (Sept., 2007), 95-110; "Greening the Theater: Taking Ecocriticism from Page to Stage," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 7:1 (2005), 84-103. Wendy Arons also renewed the call for an ecology theater in 2007 in "Introduction to Special Section on 'Performance and Ecology,'" *Theatre Topics* 17:2 (September 2007), 93. In 2012, in their co-editorial outing *Readings in Performance and Ecology*, Arons and May together noted that "As a scholarly and artistic community we have largely failed to rise to Una Chaudhuri's challenge, published in Theater in 1994, to play our role in addressing the crisis of values that the current ecological crisis represents. Theorists and scholars," they argue, "now have an opportunity— we would argue a responsibility— to critically apply an ecological perspective to theatrical representation, and, in this way, take the lead in forging a space, and sensibility, into which artists may increasingly move to create." Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May, eds., *Readings in Performance and Ecology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

Marranca, Theresa May, Wendy Arons, Downing Cless and Baz Kershaw in addition to Chaudhuri herself—have advanced discussions about an ecocritical theater over the last two decades by drawing upon ecological language and concepts, there remains no cohesive, discursive framework to organize this language and, with it, the structure and goals of an ecocritical theater. Nor is there a clear, consistent methodology to analyze staging conventions in the context of ecological sensibilities. In other words, we still lack many of the tools necessary to create a fully realized ecocritical theater.

In the pages that follow, I argue that the work of an ecocritical theater may be advanced through the organization of two genres, landscape theater and ecology theater. Landscape theater examines the ways in which many formal theatrical conventions generate the ruptures between humans and nature that Chaudhuri argues are sites of ecopathologies.[28] In contrast, an ecology theater follows the ethos of Barry Commoner's "First Law of Ecology: Everything is Connected to Everything Else" to acknowledge and explore, both topically and formally, connections between theater and the ecosphere.[29] In short, landscape names the theater's "self-reflexive" examination of its own contribution to the anthropocentric attitudes and practices of disconnection between the theater and the ecosystem that Chaudhuri defines, and expands upon the analytical models she demonstrates. Ecology theater, compellingly named but largely undefined and unexamined in Chaudhuri's—and others'—work, explores theater's connections with the

[28] Landscape theater already names a loosely organized genre of dramatic texts and performances, proposed by Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, that engage issues of nature, staging and spectatorship. See Fuchs and Chaudhuri, eds., *Land/Scape/Theatre* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002).

[29] Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 27 [capitalized in original].

ecosystem by acknowledging the theater's place within the ecosystem.[30] Together, these genres represent two discrete, complementary functions of an overarching ecocritical theater.

Surprisingly, there are few formal definitions of ecocriticism for the theater. Most theater scholarship treats "ecocriticism" as essentially synonymous with ecology. A useful foundation for a theatrical definition of the term lies, however, in literary studies. In the pioneering work *An Ecocriticism Reader,* Cheryl Glotfelty defines literary ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment," adding, "ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies [and] expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere."[31] By extension, ecocritical theater takes an earth-centered approach to theater in order to understand the ways in which plays and performances resist continuity with the surrounding world (landscape theater) and to establish the potential for theater to re-enter the ecosystem it walled away so long ago (ecology theater). The ecological genre assumes that theater, like the humans by and for whom it is made, never really left—nor could leave—the ecosystem to begin with. The genre of landscape theater, however, self-reflexively performs and criticizes the "ruptures" between humans and the ecosystem named in part by the false dichotomy of nature and generated at times by the theater itself.

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[30] The terms "ecology theater" and "ecologies of theater" appear in the work of Elinor Fuchs, Bonnie Marranca and Theresa May, among others. But Fuchs and Marranca envision what I argue are ecocritically damaging—to the point, almost, of becoming anti-ecological—versions of the concept. May's work is far more faithful to ecological ideologies but does little to further develop the generalized notion of ecology Chaudhuri proposes. See Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Marranca, *Ecologies of Theatre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); May, "Greening the Theater," in *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, and "Beyond Bambi" in *Theatre Topics*.

[31] Cheryll Glotfelty, "Introduction," *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii, xix. Glotfelty predicates this principle of inclusivity in part on Commoner's First Law of Ecology.

Note that the term "nature" has multiple definitions, one of which refers to inherent essences—in a behavioral context, for instance, human "nature"—and another that denotes the nonhuman elements of the world, including plants and animals. The latter idea of "nature," which I use throughout this dissertation, divides humanity from the plants, non-human animals and other elements—soil, rocks, waterways—that populate and form the planet. The ecocritic and historian Max Oelschlaeger describes the "natural" divide between humanity and the rest of the world in vividly theatrical terms, explaining that "through the lens of history human experience takes place entirely outside nature. The world becomes merely a stage upon which the human drama is enacted. The wild plants and animals, the web of life with which our humanity is bound, and without which the human drama could not be enacted, become bit players."[32] Note too that nowhere here does "nature" include humans or suggest a sense of holistic, ecosystemic continuity.[33] Humanity stands staunchly in the foreground as nature provides an aesthetically pleasing—or vexingly disordered—backdrop. Only occasionally is nature drawn forward and then solely to serve or complicate humanity's grand designs.

In order to create a more solid foundation for the work of the landscape theater and ecology theater genres in the chapters that follow, I investigate the complex, unexpected and, at times, troubling histories of landscape and ecology in both theatrical and sociohistorical contexts throughout the remainder of this introduction. First, however, a word about the methodology I adopt to populate these genres. I believe, as does

[32] Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, 7-8.

[33] Nevertheless, "nature" is often used to mean just this, even by ecocritics. I use this sense of "nature" as false dichotomy throughout the dissertation. As necessary, I attempt to clarify any contrasting definitions of the term used by other authors to whose I ideas I refer.

Chaudhuri, that "The theoretical sources of an ecological"—or in the particular lexicon of this dissertation, ecocritical—"theater may be found within theater history itself."[34] Accordingly, the plays I examine in the first half of this dissertation, as I test the basic definitions and conventions of landscape theater and ecology theater, feature prominently in the broader theatrical canon. Furthermore, all of the plays and productions I investigate here lie—at least primarily—within the realm of what Michael Kirby has called "matrixed" performance, a function of "traditional theater" in which "the performer always functions within (and creates) a matrix of time, place, and character," an "artificial, imaginary, interlocking structure[,] […] an intentionally created and consciously possessed world, or matrix […]."[35] Kirby adds that "it is precisely the disparities between this manufactured reality and the spectators' reality that make the play potentially significant to the audience."[36] Additionally, many of the works I investigate have already been discussed in ecocritical contexts by other theater scholars. My goal is not to retread well-explored territory but to bring new perspective to the rich ecocritical potential of theater by resituating and clarifying the goals of the project along topical, discursive, and formal lines. Throughout, I have also chosen to work with plays and productions that were generally neither written nor staged as direct acts of ecocritical commentary.[37] I want, instead, to catch theatermakers "in the act" of engaging with

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[34] Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 28.

[35] Michael Kirby, "Happenings: An Introduction," in *Happenings and Other Acts*, Mariellen R. Sanford, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5. There are two exceptions to the stipulation I present above. Both of the plays I examine in chapter four involve at least some non-matrixed performance elements. I argue that these non-matrixed moments are essential to creating ecologically resonant forms of staging.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Including the sort, alas, that Henry Bial refers to as "The Peace and Love Community Player's Original Production of 'Save the Spotted Owl' [Postshow Discussion with Yoga Circle and Group Rendition of

ecocritical issues, of exploring landscape and ecology paradigms both topically and formally in order to gauge just how deeply ecocriticism may matter to the theater—for as I hope this study helps to demonstrate, theater means a great deal to ecocriticism.

In the second half of the dissertation, I bring the practices of environmental staging, which shifts audiences and performances away from the frontal orientation of the most conventional theater, into conversation with both landscape theater and ecology theater. The stage, particularly the proscenium stage, strongly resembles a picture hanging in its frame—a close relation to the frame of landscape painting. Environmental staging offers the opportunity to push the limits of landscape theater beyond the literal, physical frame of the proscenium in order to discover the ways in which other and, in some cases, more subtle theatrical framing devices may also perpetuate the ruptures that landscape instantiates.

Traditional staging, however, presents distinct critical and formal problems for ecology theater. I expand upon these below but, in broad strokes, ecology theater resists the traditional staging conventions of theater, whereas landscape theater is largely defined by the very same conventions. Even a play that is topically aligned with ecological principles might fail as an example of formal theatrical ecology if the play is performed on a stage, seemingly insulated from the ecosystem.[38] Ecology theater, then, must often

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Kumbaya to Follow].” See Arons, “Introduction to Special Section on ‘Performance and Ecology,’” in *Theatre Topics*, 93.

[38] I use the word “seemingly” here to allude to the fact that nothing on earth can really be separate from the ecosystem. Every surface on the planet—from the mountainside to the stage—is inhabited by flora and fauna, sometimes visibly and almost always microscopically. When I discuss the perceived presence or absence of ecosystemic elements within the theater, however, I focus almost entirely on the visible traces of the living ecosystem onstage—people, for the most part, notwithstanding—or, in the case of environmental staging, in the ecosphere itself. This distinction is admittedly problematic. Further investigation of the ubiquity of the ecosystem, including on the stage, and its relevance to the theater demand further investigation; such study, however, lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

limit itself to topical treatments of ecological phenomena—usually detrimental ones—on the traditional Western stage. Moved from "the boards" and into the realm of environmental staging, however, ecology theater's formal potential expands significantly. As a result, environmental staging presents what may be the best performance context for ecology theater, particularly when those performances occur outdoors.

Finally, at their most particular, debates regarding landscape and ecology as well as the slow process to make these ideas coherent within the practice of theater should be relevant to theater, literary and visual theorists in addition to ecocritics in a variety of fields. More broadly, however, theater itself is deeply informed by the privilege of the viewer, the same privilege that shapes not only the critical contours of landscape thinking but the anthropocentric ethos it implies by asserting humankind's authority over the earth and its many species. This attitude, ecocritics argue, has contributed to the ecological crises surrounding us.[39] Ironically, these are the same crises that have also led humans to begin to abandon their own notions of nature as "other" in favor of a more unified understanding of ecosystems and, in particular, humanity's own crucial *and* decentered place within those ecosystems. In turn, as theater teaches us about our relationships with the world, ecosystemic relationships can teach us about the practice of theater by helping to clarify the ramifications of perceptual and spatial structures such as landscapes while also revealing the expansive capacity of theater to influence the world—and ecological

[39] See Jay Martin, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Vision and Visuality*: *Volume 2, Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Hal Foster, ed. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 19-20; J.B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 70; Mirella Billi, "Landscape Aesthetics in the 18th Century: From Description to Vision," in *Literary Landscapes, Landscapes in Literature*, Michele Bottalico, Maria Teresa Chialant and Eleonora Rao, eds. (Rome: Carocci, 2007), 62; John Wylie, *Landscape* (New York, Routledge, 2007), 144-45. Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 421; Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*, 78, 350.

attitudes toward the world—beyond the proscenium frame. In order to better understand the potential of these influences, I will now further explore landscape, ecology and the theatrical genres they define.

Landscape and Landscape Theater

Imagine a walk in the countryside. The day is warm and breezy; sunlight floods open fields accented by the occasional shadow, evidence of the trees that soften the scene at the edges of your vision. In the distance, you see a small cottage, a plowed field, the tantalizing glimpse of a stream. You have abandoned, if briefly, the comfort of your urban life or ventured, perhaps, to the outer edges of your country estate to appreciate nature for the day. You travel toward a small hill in the distance. As you climb, the rustle of fabric accompanies your steps, drowning out the sound of the breeze. When you reach the top, you look out onto a broad expanse, taking in the lines of other hills, of distant trees, of the rough slope of earth leading down to flowing water, which etches a deep twist of blue into the land at the bottom of your line of vision. But aesthetically unrefined, this view seems incomplete. You turn away.

With your back to this vista, you extract a square mirror from your pocket—a Claude Glass. Named for the seventeenth century painter Claude Lorrain, this "small, tinted, convex mirror" with a pronounced gilt edge and sepia-toned glass reflects the world in the muted hues characteristic of Lorrain's work, which informed the eighteenth and nineteenth century conventions of landscape art prior to the work of the Impressionists.[40] You raise this embellished Looking-glass before you, angling it just so

[40] Allen Carlson, "Appreciation and the Natural Environment," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 37:3 (Spring 1979), 270.

over your right shoulder to behold the refined reflection of the landscape you glimpsed a moment before, the same land, the same trees, the same stream, vastly improved. Here, you see nature's garish greens softened to a subtle gray-brown; the brilliant, almost blinding light of the sun tamed to understated ambience; the unmanageable, inconceivable expanse of open space defined by a clear frame, a focused perspective. Here, you see nature perfected: a picturesque landscape.

This scenario exemplifies a common practice among connoisseurs and practitioners of landscape art throughout the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Armed with Claude Glasses, viewers sought a perspective of the world deemed to be more aesthetically pleasing than the brighter—in other words, lurid—shades of nature. Both Lorrain's reflective namesake and his paintings created idealized images of terrain, defined sections of open space that were observable at a glance and, through framing and tinting, more pleasing to the refined eye. The Claude Glass visually reformed untamed spaces into manageable, aesthetic and decidedly unnatural objects. But the Claude Glass did more than emphasize a visual experience of the world; as does the genre of landscape painting it was created to replicate, the darkened, framed mirror distanced the viewer from the world. Accordingly, the Claude Glass illustrates the particularly human project to organize the natural world for both utilitarian and aesthetic purposes. These endeavors are hardly mutually exclusive. Together, they tell the story of humanity's relationship to the intricate constructs of nature. Landscape illustrates this tale. Landscape theater stages it.

Contested, glorified and at times denigrated, "Landscape," in the words of John Wylie, "is tension," hovering between the material and the conceptual.[41] The Dutch *landschap* contributed a visual connotation to the term landscape, "land as perceived, or a picture of land."[42] This version of the word characterizes the aesthetic sense of landscape—in short, landscape painting. But the German *landschäft* or "'bounded area' of land" that emerged alongside *landschap* complicates this notion of landscape by adding a spatial nuance, one that demands physical habitation.[43] Additionally, the German variation of the term was purportedly taken up by some geographers in order to emphasize the scientific rather than artistic character of their work.[44] Taken together, *landschap* and *landschäft* form an ontological conundrum. How can one physically occupy a place (*landschäft*) that exists only as an artistic depiction of place (*landschap*) in the unified realm of both perception and conception, the mind?

Landscape's complex past informs its more contemporary applications as well. At its most basic, the term denotes an aesthetically pleasing stretch of land, work done to reorganize that land for aesthetic purposes or, crucially, the land's aesthetic depiction. Landscape may evoke the image of a well-manicured lawn with burgeoning flowerbeds. Perhaps some exquisitely molded topiaries lurk at the perimeter of this scene. Or maybe the vast, sublime expanse of the Grand Canyon, the Athenian countryside and the deep, urban valleys of Manhattan come to mind. Vistas and spaces, both for human enjoyment

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[41] Wylie, *Landscape*, 1.

[42] Ibid., 21.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Denis Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 10:1 (1985), 57.

or, at the very least, consumption in one form or another: these are such stuff as landscape is made on, giving way to more conceptual terminology as well. References to the "landscape" of a given situation evoke notions of "the big picture" complete with topographical nuance. In short, "landscape" is a useful term, vague enough to be versatile, and sufficiently concrete to elicit a sense of solid ground.

Until the mid-twentieth century, landscape ideas were dominated by the aesthetic. In practice, however, the aesthetic ideals that landscape engenders reached deeply into the ways humans not only saw the world, but the ways in which they organized and, as a result, utilized the world. The landscape theorist Denis Cosgrove explains:

> Landscape is […] a composition and structuring of the world so that it may be appropriated by a detached, individual spectator to whom an illusion of order and control is offered through the composition of space according to the certainties of geometry. That illusion very frequently complemented a very real power and control over fields and farms on the part of patrons and owners of landscape paintings.[45]

The tension between illusion and physical manifestation Cosgrove points to is indicative of the debate taking place among landscape theorists today.[46] The advent of social landscape theory in the 1950s foregrounded the sweeping economic and sociocultural ramifications of attempts to control natural terrain. Around this time, John Brinckerhoff Jackson, by all accounts the father of social landscape theory, coined the term "vernacular landscape," meaning not a "scenic or ecological entity" but "a political or

[45] Ibid., 55.

[46] An exhaustive review of the history of landscape practice and theory lies beyond the scope of this project, but several key points that have evolved throughout the landscape debate reveal much about the impact of landscape both on the development of art and more expansively, our approaches to living within any environment shaped by tacit or direct human intervention.

cultural entity, changing in the course of history."[47] More specifically, Jackson claims that "landscape is not a natural feature of the environment but a *synthetic* space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land, functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community […] a space deliberately created to speed up or slow down the process of nature."[48] Vernacular landscape, in short, inverts traditional thinking about the character of landscape, constructing terrain reflective of the idealized paintings of the so-called natural world—a reflection, as it were, of a reflection.

Cosgrove, whose work developed out of Jackson's readings of the vernacular landscape, proposes that landscape functions most effectively when it refers to "a way of seeing."[49] On the surface, this definition of landscape offers a relatively straightforward way to resolve the ontological difficulties that arise from the attempt to reconcile a dynamic perceiver with the land under examination by creating a mediating force between the two. To "see" a place as a landscape is to remove that place from a spatial expanse, to make it a separate area further distinguished by a set of aesthetic characteristics—framing, perspective, a visually pleasing appearance—and, eventually, utilitarian practices. Cosgrove's definition reveals the deeply ambivalent, frequently slippery theoretical ground of landscape thinking.

Nevertheless, "a way of seeing" falls short of fully describing the phenomenon of landscape. In *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell announces his intent to "change

[47] J.B. Jackson, "The Order of a Landscape," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, D.W. Meinig, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 153.

[48] J.B. Jackson. *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 8.

[49] Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 46. See also Wylie, *Landscape*, 1.

'landscape' from a noun to a verb" in order to situate landscape "not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed."[50] Mitchell's invocation of the word "process" is crucial to exploring the implications of landscape for the individual who shifts—or seems to shift—out of the role of the viewer and back into that of an inhabitant of the land viewed or depicted. Once envisioned, it is difficult if not impossible to erase the landscape perspective. Landscape is also a recursive process whereby a perceiver effects change in the terrain he or she has observed by reshaping the land, tacitly or actively, to align with the landscape image; one who sees terrain as landscape in a Claude Glass can seldom "un-see" that terrain as an aesthetic composition. Landscape is a place we imagine, project onto a given swath of terrain, and then deploy—again, through the acts of re-envisioning and, often, material alteration—within that terrain as part of a cyclical process.

Cosgrove points out that the particular form of re-envisioning or reshaping—in other words, landscaping—enacted upon terrain is often socioculturally determined because "landscape represents an historically specific way of experiencing the world developed by, and meaningful to, certain social groups. Landscape […] is an ideological concept."[51] Historically, the form of this ideology has been one of control engendered, in part, by the conventions of landscape painting. Cosgrove explains that "Realist representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface through linear perspective directs the external world towards the individual located outside that space. It

[50] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

[51] Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formulation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 15.

gives the eye absolute mastery over space."[52] This mastery extends to the desire to "control the external world," to restructure the land itself.[53]

This urge to restructure the world was, for instance, frequently performed on the nineteenth century English countryside. The timing of this proliferation of landscape was a direct result of the influence of landscape painting upon the aesthetic tastes of those who could afford both artwork and rural estates—most often, the landed gentry. Influenced by the desire to create pleasing views of the land that replicated or, at the very least, referenced the structure of landscape painting, early landscape architects began to employ structures such as "ha-ha." These "ha-ha," still in use today, are trenches that act as invisible barriers to keep grazing animals, especially sheep, away from gardens and open spaces meant for purely aesthetic enjoyment.[54] Land became a new canvas for artists, but the mode of enjoying landscape remained staunchly visual as these spaces were designed to be seen from particular, removed perspectives, an effect that could be ruined by habitation. Landscaping techniques like the ha-ha reshaped the terrain as a "framable possession" and generated a privileged landscape perspective.[55] Such proprietary images fortified the commanding position of the privileged viewer and transformed landscape into an empirical, commercial and sociopolitical tool. Carole Fabricant explains that

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[52] Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 48.

[53] Cosgrove, *Social Formulation and Symbolic Landscape*, 18.

[54] Carole Fabricant, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics*, Ralph Cohen, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 51.

[55] Billi, "Landscape Aesthetics in the 18th Century," in *Literary Landscapes, Landscapes in Literature* 62.

> The aesthetics of landscape […] [were] very much tied up with the "business" as well as the pleasure of garden design—with the conspicuous consumerism of wealthy estate owners, willing to pay large sums to transform their property into works of art that were at the same time salable commodities.[56]

By reshaping the nation's natural terrain, the English gentry reflected back the models of idealized landscape they learned through the work of landscape painters like Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin, who sought to project perfected images of nature onto their surroundings and, by extension, the symbolic perfection of the land and nations these images represented. "Landscape," Cosgrove concludes, "is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of the world."[57] He suggests that the content of landscape is contingent upon the subjectivity of the viewer. The viewer's ability to read the land as landscape makes that land visible and legible within the context of human activity—and I will add, echoing J.B. Jackson, it also makes landscape synthetic. It is this relationship between the self and world that landscape addresses. As a mediating process, landscape reveals the ways in which we not only see but also seek to control the world and, more precisely, the ecosphere by transforming it into nature.

The anthropocentric power of landscape emerged within the theater as well—as the early practices of ancient Greece and Rome suggest—through scenography. Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones' *Masque of Blackness*, presented for the court of James I on Twelfth Night of 1605, offers a prime example of the compositional elements and symbolic force of landscape as well as their sociopolitical impact.[58] The masque also

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[56] Fabricant, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics*, 53.

[57] Cosgrove, *Social Formulation and Symbolic Landscape,* 13.

[58] Ben Jonson, "The Masque of Blackness," in *The Complete Masques,* Stephen Orgel, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 47.

marks the first direct reference to landscape or, more accurately, "landtschap" in English theater.[59] Landscapes had made previous appearances in theater as scenographic elements—most famously, and significantly, in Sebastiano Serlio's perspectival, painted backdrops of pastoral vistas and cityscapes, which were staples of the Italian Renaissance stage and which inspired the work of countless scenographers, including Jones. Jonson and Jones' landscape, however, was not a backdrop. Instead, a curtain bearing a landscape was placed front and center to precede and contextualize the action of the performance: "First, for the *Scene,* was drawn a Landtschap, consisting of small woods, and here and there a void place fill'd with huntings."[60] This hunting scene depicted the flora and fauna of Britain encoded within the favorite pastime of the gentry; in other words, the landscape was an archetypal image of British identity. When the landscape curtain fell, it revealed a "savage" land, the banks of the Niger. The rough plot of *Blackness* follows the revelation that the dark-skinned daughters of Niger, performed by Queen Anne and the ladies of the Jacobean court in blackface, can become pure, meaning "white," only if they bathe in the waters of the Thames. Although the scenic spectacle of the masque unfolds solely within the land of Niger, the piece staunchly asserts the inferiority of the African landscape, particularly when contrasted with the perfect image of Britain—and Britishness—that opens the piece.

This perfected image of Britain is significant to landscape for two reasons. First, it establishes the British ecosystem (here, already run through the machinations of depiction and utility to become nature, the domain and tool of humanity) and its unruly wilds for

[59] Ibid., 48. This is Jonson's approximation of the term "landschap" or "land as perceived, or a picture of land." See Wylie, *Landscape*, 21

[60] Jonson, "The Masque of Blackness," in *The Complete Masques*, 48.

hunting as a "framable possession," the ideal space for a superior race of humans.[61] That these wilds were also the highly organized properties (space for hunting, space for living) of British royalty underlies—and underlines—the force of the image. Second, it establishes the frame of landscape as aesthetically definitive. Within the organized, clearly bounded field of the proscenium frame, which Jones often used for masques, nature becomes accessible, acceptable and supreme.[62] Stephen Orgel notes that "a framed painting is possessed, limited, defined […] and what it depicts becomes an epitome, life in miniature and under control. So it is with framed land, designated as a 'stage' for human action, and the framed stage, a dramatic environment created for and possessed by its audience."[63] Moreover, because *Blackness* was a royal masque, its audience was comprised mostly of royalty and gentry. Only those of distinct rank, power and, therefore, taste, it was assumed, could properly see—and, therefore, appreciate—the privileged framework of British power both represented and imposed by landscape. Orgel explains: "The masque presents the triumph of an aristocratic community; at its center is a belief in the hierarchy and a faith in the power of idealization."[64] Jones' landscape establishes, literally and figuratively, the framed perspective his audiences would bring to bear upon the spectacle of savage inferiority the masque performs and that its sequel, *The*

[61] Billi, "Landscape Aesthetics in the 18th Century," in *Literary Landscapes, Landscapes in Literature*, 62.

[62] Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 201.

[63] Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 21.

[64] Ibid., 40.

Masque of Queens, seeks to correct.[65] This perspective would set the tone for the legacy of landscape in the coming centuries—one, I argue, that persists today.

Despite the proliferation of landscape imagery in theater over hundreds of years and across cultures, Gertrude Stein was the first playwright to use the term "landscape" to define a particular theatrical genre. In a lecture aptly titled "Plays," delivered during her whirlwind 1934 tour of America, Gertrude Stein explains that she has resolved her longstanding complaint with the theater—that her perceptual and emotional rhythms seemed to run counter to those of the performances she watched— by considering plays as landscapes.[66] Referring to the opera/landscape play *Four Saints in Three Acts* she was promoting at the time of her "Lectures in America" series, Stein explains that "the magpies [of *Four Saints*] may tell their story if they and you like or even if I like […] but that they stay in the air is not a story but a landscape. That scarecrows stay on the ground is the same thing it could be a story but it is a piece of landscape."[67] She argues that without the tempo of plots or stories— after all, she points out, "Everybody knows so many stories and what is the use of telling another"—or the complex motivations of characters with whom audiences must "make acquaintance," spectators could survey a play's aesthetic composition, allowing the relationships among the many material elements of a play and their fluctuating signification, whether semiotic or mimetic, to become the play's main points of focus.[68]

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[65] *The Masque of Queens* was played at the court of King James I in 1609. Jonson, *The Complete Masques,* 122.

[66] Gertrude Stein, "Plays," in *Last Operas and Plays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1949), xlvi.

[67] Ibid., li.

[68] Ibid., xliv.

Stein's landscape plays are, therefore, self-conscious compositions. *Four Saints and Three Acts* engages in an ongoing interrogation of both itself and Stein. The opera demands to know "how many saints [its characters]" and "how many acts are there in it" in active concern with its own development.[69] Jane Palatini Bowers refigures landscape plays as "lang-scapes"—an abbreviation for "language-scapes"—in order to emphasize the compositional essence of Stein's work:

> Instead of moving with the actor and the action, her plays oppose them and create a kind of verbal stasis within theater time, much as a landscape painting extracts a moment from time's flow and freezes it in a visual space or as a "natural" landscape interferes with the processes of nature. Within this stasis, Stein scripts an event not normally represented in the theater of her time: the writing of the play.[70]

Even Stein's writing practices, which Martin Puchner describes as "moving her chair about in order to get different perspectives" in her Bilignin garden, compared with the techniques of the Impressionists who painted "in nature," demonstrate her engagement with the priorities of composition.[71] And like Cezanne's stylized paintings, Stein's work—keeping with the aesthetic impact of much of the landscape tradition—makes audience members aware of her artistry first and the natural referent second.[72]

Only in the last twenty years have theater theorists begun to embrace Stein's—or, really, any—landscape terminology, reflecting a shift across a number of disciplines in

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[69] Stein, "Four Saints in Three Acts," in *Last Operas and Plays,* 478.

[70] Jane Palatini Bowers, "The Composition That All The World Can See: Gertrude Stein's Theater Landscapes," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 132. See also Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-theatricality and drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 113; Marvin Carlson, "After Stein" in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 147.

[71] Puchner, *Stage Fright,* 107.

[72] Puchner further explains that "a large portion of stein's text depicts not St. Teresa, but the process of writing an opera about her. The story of St. Teresa, with its numerous saints, pigeons, gardens, photographs, and the invocation of Barcelona, never quite gets under way; or rather, it is constantly being interrupted by the predominant secondary 'meta'-story of writing an opera." Ibid., 113.

the latter portion of the twentieth century from temporal to "spatial paradigms."[73] In their 2002 editorial collaboration *Land/Scape/Theater*, Elinor Fuchs and (once more) Una Chaudhuri propose that "landscape" names this new spatial emphasis in theater, arguing that over the last century landscape has become, if tacitly, a descriptive tool, discursive category and staging technique—in short, a theatrical practice.[74] The fragmented title of their project, "*Land/Scape/Theater*," is a self-conscious nod to the complexities of the subject, the "discontinuities and occlusions within the assumptions attached to the idea of landscape itself," as "[t]he very word," they note, "embodies an awkward conflict, straddling the gritty specificities of the material world and the idealizations of various aesthetic traditions."[75] But landscape theater, Chaudhuri further argues, also offers the opportunity to negotiate these "discontinuities and occlusions" by "reanimat[ing] the life-art dialectic that realism had enclosed within its illusory four walls," moving from "two-dimensional representation to three-dimensional environment" just as landscape evolved "from a tract of land capable of being seen at a glance to an environment one can explore and inhabit."[76] As a result, the landscape theater Fuchs and Chaudhuri propose pushes beyond spatial awareness to describe a "visual and dramaturgical" shift in theatrical form and content wherein "landscape for the first time held itself apart from character and

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[73] Fuchs and Chaudhuri, "Land/Scape/Theater and the New Spatial Paradigm," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 2. Michel Foucault predicted this shift from the temporal to the spatial in his essay from 1986 "Of Other Spaces," Jay Miskowiecz, trans., *Diacritics* 16:1 (Spring, 1986), 22-27. Long before Foucault, John Ruskin predicted a similar shift in emphasis away from the poetic to the visual in his 1856 essay "Of Modern Landscape," *The Ruskin Reader* (London: George Allen, 1895).

[74] Fuchs and Chaudhuri choose the term "landscape" because, they argue, while it negotiates the largely visual orientation of theater, landscape is "more grounded and available to visual experience than space, but more environmental and constitutive of the imaginative order than place." Fuchs and Chaudhuri, "Land/Scape/Theater and the New Spatial Paradigm," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 2-3.

[75] Ibid., 2.

[76] Chaudhuri, "Land/Scape/Theory," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 21.

became a figure of its own."[77] Fuchs and Chaudhuri trace this movement back to the Romantic period during which, they claim, landscape began to "flow back to the natural world" presenting "not only […] works of art on canvas, but […] signs of various relationships to nature itself, ranging from the economic to the spiritual."[78] Their work to codify landscape as a form of theater that decenters humanity within the life-art dialectic acts, they hope, "as a step toward the restoration of the natural and built environment, and of the nonhuman order, to appropriate presence in considerations of dramatic forms and meanings."[79] In other words, Fuchs and Chaudhuri hope to use landscape to resist anthropocentrism in the theater, a position further solidified by their claim that the interests of cultural landscape studies are at least attendant upon those of ecology.[80]

The problem with this idea is that while both Fuchs and Chaudhuri refer to landscape as if it has finally escaped its history as aesthetic object and concept to become an independent entity, even social landscape theorists, whose work would offer the most likely space for this sort of discursive overhaul, offer no such argument. To the contrary, as a wealth of both aesthetic and social landscape theory demonstrates, landscape is framed and imbued with anthropocentric assumptions in which the viewer, even as she inhabits landscape "space," experiences that terrain through the lens—akin to the Claude Glass—of conceptual distance. Baz Kershaw expresses a similar concern regarding

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[77] Fuchs and Chaudhuri, "Land/Scape/Theater and the New Spatial Paradigm," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 3.

[78] Ibid., 2.

[79] Ibid., 4.

[80] Ibid., 3. J.B. Jackson, whose work Fuchs and Chaudhuri cite as a significant force in the formation of landscape thinking in the twentieth century, explicitly rejects any engagement between cultural landscape studies and the priorities of ecology, either scientifically or ideologically. See Jackson, "Learning about Landscape," in *The Necessity for Ruins*.

Fuchs' and Chaudhuri's work, noting that "Whether landscape is seen as a source of rejuvenating contemplation (a feast for the eyes of the Enlightenment) or of spiritual renewal (a succour for the soul of Romanticism) it is most usually at the service of 'man.'"[81] Landscape may have established itself as a "figure of its own," but it remains a "figure" of human creation and service in antithesis to the aims of ecology.

Fuchs, nevertheless, connects landscape with ecology even more directly in her earlier work *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism*. As in her collaboration with Chaudhuri, Fuchs uses the term "landscape" to define theater's emerging spatial paradigm while warning, in concert with Bowers and Puchner, that "the meaning of landscape derived from Stein, whether natural or not, is conceptual."[82] She then expands the bounds of landscape beyond Stein's contemplative compositions to include the static theater of Maurice Maeterlinck, citing both as examples of the shift to a static, spatial paradigm in theater. Together, Stein's and Maeterlinck's works frame "a new common ground" within much of the theater of the twentieth century. "How marvelously the metaphor from landscape rushes in," Fuchs notes, to describe the intrigue of works that have no linear temporal structure or concern with character or plot, but offer instead access to "the entire *field*, the whole *terrain*, the total *environment* of the performance."[83] Within this totalizing space, landscape may utilize "important moments of imagery from natural landscape" and, moreover, foster a type of spectatorship she refers to as "the new pastoral in theater" that "draws on a perceptual faculty not unlike

[81] Baz Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 309.

[82] Fuchs, *The Death of Character,* 12.

[83] Ibid., 106 [emphasis in original].

that developed by ecology, a systems-awareness that moves sharply away from the ethos of competitive individualism toward a vision of the whole, however defined in any given setting."[84] It is through this pastoral awareness, she claims, that "we are becoming ecologists of theater."[85] Once more, some of the struggles of forming an ecocritical theater emerge.

Despite seeking to align landscape and pastoralism with ecology, Fuchs' sense of the "entire field" of the ecosystem nevertheless seems to stop at the edge of the stage, at the boundary of landscape theater. As "ecologists of theater," she claims, we are "[n]o longer fascinated by the struggles of single organisms in their habitats—which translates here into individual characters in their theatrical settings" and, therefore, "pull back to scan Thornton Wilder's intuited intersection of myth, Stein and landscape, where the thing-held-full-in-view-the-whole-time becomes the measure of theatrical interest."[86] The "thing" in question, however, is itself a composition. Although *Four Saints in Three Acts* includes natural objects and terrain, Stein—and Maeterlinck too, as I will later demonstrate—is more concerned with depicting the formation of dramatic events than she is with engaging the ecosystem. Once more, the ecosphere is transformed into nature, into a store-house for humanity's aesthetic and utilitarian objectives, and the site of terrain is, in this case, situated onstage as landscape. Much of this—the appropriation of the ecosystem for human purposes, the rupture of nature, the synthetic essence of landscape—aligns with my own definition of the landscape genre in theater with one

[84] Ibid., 107.

[85] Ibid., 97, 107.

[86] Ibid., 107.

crucial difference: Fuchs fails to acknowledge the "rupture" she herself has established by equating ecology with what is essentially a human-centered aesthetic system situated on the stage. By focusing on performance as both the site and object of ecological systems, Fuchs shifts the meaning of "ecology" from the particular to the broadly symbolic, what Chaudhuri once criticized as a "metaphorical ecology," in which Fuchs' "ecologists of theater" move further away from the actual ecosystem to structure their own insular theatrical systems.[87]

This is the trick—and power—of landscape: while it may seem to offer comprehensive images of environments, in fact it presents an illusion that offers viewers a sense of distant control over the environment being viewed.[88] Fuchs asks, "Can it be we've been so fascinated with Stein's cubism, that we haven't seen her pastoralism?"[89] The answer is yes, but not because—as artists, audiences or critics—we have failed to see a profound, positive connection between Stein's work and the ecosystem. Rather, we have failed to attend to the ways in which landscape compositions resist connection with the ecosystem and in which the theater, in turn, engages natural elements not as a means to connect with or celebrate the ecosphere—except as it becomes "natural" space under

[87] Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 27. Here, Chaudhuri refers not to Fuchs' work,but to Bonnie Marranca's "Robert Wilson and the Idea of the Archive: Dramaturgy as an Ecology," *Performing Arts Journal* 15:1 (January 1993), 66-79, in which several of the ideas that would later take shape in Marranca's 1996 *Ecologies of Theater* first appear. I will address the specific issue Chaudhuri takes with Marranca's "metaphorical ecology" in the next section, "Ecology and Ecology Theater."

[88] See also Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology,* 310. I complicate this claim in chapter three by placing the landscape genre in the context of perambulatory and immersive environmental staging, which *seem* to offer audience members direct access to environments. However, these environments, while physically accessible, remain conceptually distant due to a series of framing devices that still largely exclude the audience from direct dramaturgical engagement with the environments and, by extension, the performances in question.

[89] Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, 95.

human control—but as a matter of appropriation. Kershaw again argues that a theater which relies on "a sustained separation between performer and spectator, however ironically framed, […] risks replaying the tropes—of landscape, of pastoral, of wilderness, for example—that may reinforce the source of the environmental nightmare in the human."[90] It follows as well that in order to understand the full impact of the landscape genre as an ecocritical force, critics must no longer ignore the role that an "idealized view of landscape" plays in shaping theater as a site of anthropocentrism.[91]

Despite the complications I examine here, both Fuchs' and Chaudhuri's work with landscape contributes to the project of ecocritical theater in two key ways: first, by establishing the need for rigorous readings of "nature" in the theater and second, by opening a nuanced conversation about the potential formulations and manifestations of landscape theater. But even though seeking methods to resist human-centered attitudes toward the ecosystem both within and through the theater is—as I argue throughout this dissertation—ambitious and necessary work, landscape is a particularly thorny tool for such rehabilitation. What landscape offers the theater instead is a way to make the anthropocentric slips and assumptions, the "ruptures, discontinuities and occlusions" between theater and the ecosystem both Fuchs and Chaudhuri address, visible and, perhaps, tractable.

The modified landscape theater genre I propose serves ecocritical theater by revealing the ways in which theater often performs and perpetuates disconnection between the ecosphere and its depictions of the ecosphere. It achieves this distance

[90] Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology*, 316.

[91] Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, 95.

through a series of formal landscape conventions. First, perspective—whether physical or conceptual—defines the position of the spectator relative to the scene depicted, generating a singular subject whose gaze commands a framed—whether literally or figuratively—vista, a composed image. Second, framing suggests a shift in awareness on the part of the viewer. Once glimpsed as landscape, land seldom returns to its former status as an ontologically independent entity in the mind of the spectator. Upon reentering this landscaped terrain, the viewer carries a sense of dominance that opens the land to his or her control. This oscillation between states of experience points to the phenomenal ambiguity of landscape. Third, landscape remains an aestheticizing force attended by a number of historically specific and, therefore, shifting aesthetic values—for example, the preference of late-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century landscape viewers for the sepia-toned hues of Claude Lorrain. When combined with the ideologies of a nation or an empire, this compositional effect turns landscape into a symbolic force.

Taken together, these ideas define landscapes as framed compositions that place the "viewer" in a space of phenomenal ambiguity and may have symbolic undertones that transform the field from a mimetic to a semiotic object. The same formal elements of landscape hold for the theater as well. Every theatrical landscape is identifiable through its preoccupation with frame and composition, symbolism and phenomenal experience. And because it reflects the rupture between humans and other beings that the term "nature" suggests, landscape theater demonstrates the ways in which some of the most pervasive conventions of theater help to perpetuate the false dichotomy of the nature-culture divide by depicting nature as significant to humans only for its aesthetic or utilitarian value. Landscape theater performs this work by acknowledging its own

complicity in the act of constructing the ruptures of nature. In this way, landscape theater is an ecocritical theater.

Ecology and Ecology Theater

If landscape and the theater it informs offer a *via negativa* to ecocritical insight, then ecology and its attendant theater offer potentially affirmative paths to the same goal. Just as theater in the West was formalized by the ancient Greeks and Romans—whose theatrical architecture and scenography, I argue, still inform the relationship between theater and the ecosystem today—the ancient Greeks and Romans also helped to structure contemporary ideas about "nature" that stand in counterpoint to "ecology." Max Oelschlaeger notes, "the Greek mind—arising in the context of agriculture—views culture as an achievement that separates human enterprise from the rest of nature."[92] The idea of "nature," then, stems from humanity's need to take from the resources that surround it—or, alternatively, to pollute its surroundings with impunity—with the assurance that humans are entitled to those resources because of their innate superiority, whether intellectual or spiritual.[93] This, ecologists claim, is one of the central reasons the world faces environmental crisis today, with ecocritics like Félix Guattari insisting, "Now more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture."[94] But it is also humanity's ongoing need for those resources and for the land—in a larger sense, the habitat humans

[92] Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness,* 59 [emphasis in original].

[93] This attitude in no way permeates every culture across the globe or every time period throughout history. Because I am focusing primarily on Western theater in this dissertation, however, I trace the notion of culture and nature primarily within the confines of Western culture and history—though here too, these attitudes are in no way absolute.

[94] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, trans. (New York: Continuum, 2008), 43.

share with the flora, fauna and other resources humanity draws upon—that have given land, plants and animals any redeeming value within the eyes of humans. Put simply, Oelschaeger says, "*nature was conceived as valueless until humanized.*"[95] It is the perpetuation of this notion that ecology, in many of its iterations, resists. Although it emerged more recently as a field of study, ecology, like landscape and nature, has a complex history and a complicated web of meanings.

The origins of ecology lie in the sciences. Ernst Haeckel first developed the term "oecologie"— from the Greek for "*oikos*," commonly translated as "home"— around 1866 to name an assemblage of Darwinian and Linnaean sciences, specifically, as the environmental historian Donald Worster puts it, "the study of all the environmental conditions of existence."[96] Tim Ingold refines the definition of ecology slightly to mean "the study of the interrelations between organisms and their environments."[97] Barry Commoner advances both of these definitions in concert with Haeckel's, explaining that ecology is the investigation of "relationships and the processes linking each living thing to the physical and chemical environment[,] […] the science of planetary housekeeping," because "the environment is, so to speak, the house created on the earth *by* living thing *for* living things."[98] In fact, "*Oikos,*" as Worster explains, "refer[red] originally to the

[95] Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness,* 33 [emphasis in the original].

[96] Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 191.

[97] Tim Ingold, "Culture and the Perception of the Environment," *Bush Base, Forest Far: Culture, Environment and Development*, E. Croll and D. Parkin ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 40. Colin R. Townsend offers a more technical definition: "Ecology is the scientific study of the distribution and abundance of organisms and the interactions that determine distribution and abundance." While the definition I have used above is more useful for theatrical purposes, Townsend's serves as a productive reminder that ecology is, first and foremost, a scientific study, but one that informs political, ideological and even critical positions. Townsend quoted in Stephen Bottoms and Matthew Goulish, ed. *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology and Goat Island* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 9.

[98] Commoner, *The Closing Circle*, 27 [emphasis in the original].

family household and its daily operations and maintenance."[99] This meaning is further linked to the Linnaean phrase "oeconomy of nature" that preceded "oecologie" during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but that eventually fell out of use in favor of Haeckel's term. [100]

In one sense, the "housekeeping" underway in the *oikos* and the "economy" operating through the "oeconomies of nature" refer to the function and balance of all living things in connection with one another, which aligns with Commoner's definition above. There is, however, a divergent application of ecology rooted in the "economies of nature," a science of accounting with humans as its beneficiaries, that still lingers today in the form of resourcism, the belief that "nature is an eco-machine, a virtual factory pouring out a stream of raw materials to be transformed into commodities."[101] Even recently, the ecologist Daniel Botkin defines a "new ecology for the twenty-first century," saying that humans should embrace "a nature that we make […] a living system whose changes we can accept, use, and control, to make the Earth a comfortable home, for each of us individually and for all of us collectively in our civilizations."[102] While little is actually new about the attitude toward nature that Botkin espouses—his ideas are relentlessly informed by the dichotomous notion of nature— this return to a resource-oriented economy of nature is surprising simply because it presents a fundamentally anthropocentric perspective in an era when more broadly inclusive notions of ecology permeate much of the ecocritical thinking in the sciences, social sciences and humanities.

[99] Worster, *Nature's Economy,* 192.

[100] Linnaeus wrote "The Oeconomy of Nature" in 1749. See Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness,* 123.

[101] Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" 25.

[102] Botkin quoted in Worster, *Nature's Economy,* 415.

These inclusive ecological philosophies or "ecosophies" resist sociohistorically informed divisions separating humans and other living beings into distinct ontological categories—the dichotomy of nature.[103]

"Deep ecology"—an ideological stance developed in 1973 by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in response to resourcism, which he called "shallow ecology"—is one of the most prominent, rigorous and debated ecosophies of today.[104] In brief, deep ecology insists that humans should not consider themselves to be separate from and certainly not superior to the flora and fauna of "nature" if for no other reason than that humans are fauna, no more or less ecologically significant than any other living thing on the planet—a singular, nonhierarchical, global ecosystem.[105] Timothy Clark further explains that "ecological insight into the complex interdependence of living things entailed a revolution in basic assumptions," according to Naess, one "in which the thinking of the 'self' must already include other organisms, and all that supports them, as part of one's own identity."[106] Clark adds that "Recognition of this 'greater self' must entail an ever-widening circle of identification with other living things."[107] Of course, this means too that human activities—architecture, agriculture and even the theater—are

[103] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 152. Both Arne Naess and Félix Guattari use the term "ecosophy" to refer to their ecological philosophies. Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess*, Alan Drengson and Bill Devall, eds. (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2008) 3; Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, trans. (New York: Continuum, 2008), 52.

[104] Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness,* 210.

[105] Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom,* 111-14.

[106] Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment,* 23-4.

[107] Ibid., 24.

effectively "natural" human behaviors that must also be understood within the broader context of the ecosphere.[108]

Naess' articulation of ecology turns criticism of the artificial separation between nature and humanity—engendered by hundreds if not thousands of years of cultural attitudes created by and about humanity's place in the world—into an ethical stance linked with the science of interactions between species and their environments. "The flourishing of human and nonhuman life on earth has inherent value," Naess explains, adding, "The value of nonhuman life-forms is independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes."[109] Nonetheless, his argument for a profound, personal, philosophical reorientation of each individual's ecological values does not preclude the engagement of human political and social action as a means to mitigate ecological crisis—the impetus for much of his ecological thinking.[110] To the contrary, Naess suggests that "'Green' economists" might be necessary to evaluate and reorganize the planet's financial systems to redirect humanity's deep ecological engagement in economic contexts, offering continued relevance for an, albeit reformed, application of economies of nature.[111] Deep ecology calls for a fundamental restructuring of humanity's

[108] Naess drew inspiration for deep ecology in part from the work of Spinoza based upon the claim, paraphrased here by Oelschlaeger, that "Natural things are what they are only in relation to the whole; there is no separate existence." Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness,* 124. See also Naess, "Spinoza and the Deep Ecology Movement" in *The Ecology of Wisdom*, 230-251.

[109] Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom*, 111.

[110] This despite Naess's explicit formulation of "deep ecology" in contradistinction to the "relative shallowness [—thus, shallow ecology—] of reform environmentalism and its questionable assumption that environmental issues can be addressed merely by adjusting given economic and political structures. Instead, Modern people treat the natural world with such brutality because their culture is based on the view that humanity is separate from and superior to it." Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment,* 23.

[111] Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom*, 113.

ecological values at every level of thought and action, from economies to the most deeply held personal convictions.

Largely in complement to Naess's deep ecology, Guattari's "ecosophical" work formalized the ideas of social, mental and environmental ecology to "question […] the whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations" through the "reconstruction of social and individual practices."[112] Inspired by Gregory Bateson's observation in his influential work *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* that "the ideas of this science [ecology] are irreversibly becoming a part of our own ecosocial system," Guattari's "three ecologies," like Naess's deep ecology, address the inextricable connection of humans—and their behavior—to the ecosystem and assert the crucial stakes involved with recognizing this connection.[113] Together, Naess, Bateson and Guattari all argue that humans must function in intentional and active harmony with the ecosystem for, as Bateson notes, "The creature that wins against its environment destroys itself."[114]

Guattari's approach to aligning "the mechanosphere [i.e., technology, one of the primary territories of human production and engagement] and the social and individual Universes of reference" with broader ecological paradigms is contingent upon "think[ing] 'transversally.'"[115] He ties "transversal" thought—a cross-territorial reckoning—to ecological processes, insisting that each ecological category—the mental, the social and

[112] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies, 41.*

[113] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1972]), 512.

[114] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 501.

[115] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies, 43.* Regarding the significance of technology as an interface with ecology, for good and ill, Commoner argues, "In modern industrial societies the most important link between society and the ecosystem on which it depends is technology." Commoner, *The Closing Circle*, 130.

the environmental—be allowed to maintain its own subjectivity, and that the categories' respective engagements with one another should be accomplished through the "process of *heterogenesis*."[116] In other words, Guattari rejects categorical homogeneity and hierarchical constructs at every level of ecological engagement in favor of an insistent subjectivity and heterogeneity for every ecological category and, moreover, every niche within every ecology. It is at this point that Guattari seems to risk a slide into the realm of the figurative, employing "ecology" as a metaphorical emblem of systemic thought. But each time the core issue of environmental degradation appears as if it will fade into the background of his analysis, he returns to the central issue. "The only true response to the ecological crisis is on a global scale," Guattari argues, "provided that it brings about an authentic political, social and cultural revolution, reshaping the objectives of the production of both material and immaterial assets."[117]

Merging ecological principles with social action—a process reflective of ecology's scientific origins and subsequent application to ecocritical thought in the social sciences and humanities—is key to addressing the ongoing environmental crisis as Naess, Bateson and Guattari argue alongside Commoner, whose First Law of Ecology—again, "everything is connected to everything else"— combines the scientific and ecocritical

[116] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 51. Guattari uses the biological word "heterogenesis" to evoke a sense of non-hierarchical subjectivity similar to the ways in which he and Gilles Deleuze use the botanical term "rhizomatic." See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987 [1980]. In its biological context, "heterogenesis" means "[a]bnormal or irregular organic development" as in "[t]he birth or origination of a living being otherwise than from a parent of the same kind." Perhaps more usefully, "heterogenesis" is linked to the terms "heterogeneous," meaning "the opposite of homogeneous," and "heterogeneity," meaning "[d]ifference or diversity in kind from other things" and suggesting, once more, rhizomatic qualities. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 27 October 2014.

[117] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 28.

aspects of ecology.[118] And given the central tenets of Naess's, Bateson's and Guattari's collective work, changes in humanity's societies must be preceded by a reorientation of individual mindset—a mental ecology—that aligns with Commoner's fundamental claim. Ultimately, "fault" for the ecological crisis "lies with human society," Commoner argues, and so "social changes contain, in their broad sweep, the solution of the environmental crisis as well."[119] The common thread running through all of this work is the consideration that in order to rebalance the ecosphere, humanity must acknowledge its own place within the ecosystem alongside its own culpability for damaging the ecosystem—a double-bind that perpetuates and complicates ecocritical thought as well as ecologically motivated intervention into the environmental crisis the world presently faces. One of the primary places to begin to develop an ecologically responsible society, then, is with the mentality of its citizens. And one essential space for reshaping this mindset lies in society's art. This link returns us to the matter of an ecocritical and, more specifically, ecological theater.

Una Chaudhuri's most significant contribution to the formation of an ecocritical theater may be her resistance to "metaphorical ecology," which, she warns, "can sometimes misrepresent the actual ecological issues at hand," reducing ecology to a set of "powerful" yet purely "descriptive tools."[120] In the last section, I discussed the ways in which Elinor Fuchs' work with ecology and landscape slips to the metaphorical. Bonnie

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[118] Commoner, *The Closing Circle*, 27. Commoner's other Laws of Ecology are "Everything Must Go Somewhere," applying the law of conservation, drawn from physics, to ecological processes, "Nature Knows Best," and "There Is No Such Thing as a Free Lunch," which Commoner translates to "every gain is won at some cost." *The Closing Circle*, 32, 33, 36 [capitalization in original].

[119] Ibid., 130, 207.

[120] Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake'" in *Theater*, 27.

Marranca's scholarship, however, far more vividly illustrates this problem and its ramifications for an ecology theater. Initially, Marranca's 1996 *Ecologies of Theater* appears to follow a "literal" ecology, in keeping with Chaudhuri's demand. Marranca reflects,

> Reading the narratives of cultures and landscapes, I began to ask whether there wasn't a more worldly way of experiencing theater. How do geography and climate influence a work? What are the ways in which plant and animal life, animate and inanimate entities, the natural and the artificial interact? How do biology and the body determine human drama?[121]

Marranca begins with a series of relevant, ecologically informed questions, prioritizing a "more worldly way of experiencing theater," which might involve a sensitivity to the other potential elements of theater she names—"geography," "climate," "plant and animal life"—but only her desire to understand the relationship between "the natural and the artificial" approaches the kind of ecocritical awareness that informs Chaudhuri's call to a theater ecology. Rather, Marranca, like Fuchs, remains focused on what ecology—via the ecosphere and, more problematically, "the natural"—can do for the theater rather than how the theater may serve the ecosystem.[122]

Prioritizing performance over the ecosystem while maintaining a "literal" sense of ecology is, however, only the first of two substantial problems with Marranca's configuration of ecology theater. Although she hopes to connect "ecology and aesthetics" in order to locate a "biocentric worldview" and "a nonhierarchical embrace of the multiplicity of species and languages in a work, in the world, that can address the issue of

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[121] Marranca, *Ecologies of Theater,* xiv.

[122] Both Marranca's *Ecologies of Theater* and Fuchs' *The Death of Character* were published in 1996. Marranca's work with a "metaphorical" ecology, to use Chaudhuri's phrasing, first emerged in1993 as a part of her article "Robert Wilson and the Idea of the Archive: Dramaturgy as an Ecology."

rights in nonsentient beings [in the theater]," that goal is relegated to secondary status when she reveals more fully the connection between ecology and aesthetics she envisions:[123]

> I have enlarged this definition [of ecology] to contemplate the world of a work as an environment linked to a cultural (aesthetic) system. Texts themselves are always alive in the world finding new life in the way they are absorbed into the works of artists through the ages and in the subjectivity of each reader/spectator. A text, then, can be considered as an organism, and a collective of texts, images or sounds an ecosystem. The interaction of this ecosystem and its cultural systems elaborates an ethics of performance I want to acknowledge.[124]

Marranca's appropriation of ecological language, tempting though it is to root the abstract notions of aesthetic systems in such vivid terms, not only strips ecology of its basic subjects, the global environment and its inhabitants, but also essentially reenacts the division between humans and nature that ecology explicitly resists. Fuchs' and Marranca's embrace of metaphorical ecology points to a troubling progression. With its rising popularity as both a discipline and ideology, "ecology" has slipped into the broader vernacular as shorthand to suggest elaborate systems of information, interaction, creation or, particularly through the ubiquity of the internet, technology. These capacious and, frankly, erroneous definitions of ecology denote a general sense of systems or a non-specific "systems-awareness," as Fuchs has called it.[125] But this sense of the term is more accurately the domain of systems theory, of which ecology is a particular sub-

[123] Marranca, *Ecologies of Theater,* xvi.

[124] Ibid., xiv.

[125] Fuchs uses the term "systems awareness" to link landscape theater to ecological practices in *The Death of Character,* 107.

category.[126] Unfortunately, this misnomer is also one of the most insidious barriers to realizing an ecocritical theater and, for that matter, an ecologically minded way of understanding the world because the metaphor effectively removes the ecosystem from "ecology." Chaudhuri warns that "To use ecology as metaphor is to block the theater's approach to the deeply vexed problem of classification that lies at the heart of ecological philosophy: are we human beings—and our activities, such as theater—an integral part of nature, or are we somehow radically separate from it?"[127] This issue, pitting the binary of nature against the unity of ecosystems, is one of the primary areas of exploration a literal ecology theater must undertake.

Drawing upon Chaudhuri's compelling but largely unrealized call to ecocritical action, the ecology theater I propose works toward acknowledging connections within and across ecosystems, including the place of the theater within the ecosphere. Ecology theater explores these connections, both topically and formally, by drawing upon a series of ecological and ecocritical principles. First, ecology reveals that, "everything is

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[126] To clarify: ecology is a system, but all systems are not ecological. See Gabriella Giannachi and Nigel Stewart, eds., *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2005), 137-39. See also Marc Auge, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995); Sally Mackey, "Drama, Landscape and Memory: to be is to be in place," *Research in Drama Education* 7:1 (2002), 9-25; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader,* Galen A. Johnson, ed. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121-49; Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind.*

[127] Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 27. Theresa May adds to Chaudhuri's critique, saying, "Some performance studies scholars deploy ecology as a kind of aesthetic systems theory in order to describe the multifarious, dynamic, and interdependent relationships between, for example, production and reception, actors and space, or theatre and its social context. No doubt, theoretical invention, playfulness, and polyphony are fundamental to discourse about performance. Ecology, however, is more than a 'du jour' theoretical term. The use of 'ecological' for rhetorical purposes (typified by Bonnie Marranca's *Ecologies of Theater*) tends merely to sanitize the term while eschewing its political as well as its material-ecological implications. Divorced from the material-ecological issues confounding contemporary society, 'ecology' is reduced in this discourse to yet another natural metaphor." See May, "Beyond Bambi," in *Theatre Topics*, 100.

connected to everything else."[128] Ecology refuses the false binary that divides humans from nature and rejects hierarchies that privilege one being over another. Second, ecology refers to the specific function of ecosystems and not to a broad sense of the systemic. In other words, paraphrasing Chaudhuri, ecology is not "metaphorical"; rather, ecology deals directly with the elements and dynamics of ecosystems.[129] Third, ecosystems include "niches" that name "the actual or potential position of an organism within a particular ecosystem, as determined by its biological role together with the set of environmental conditions under which it lives."[130] These niches allow for the same sort of heterogeneity and, subsequently, subjectivity that Guattari ascribes to his ecological categories, allowing organisms and their behaviors a range of differentiation without necessarily stipulating physical—or any other sort of—separation from one another. These principles combine to define ecology as a way of understanding the world which stipulates that everything and everyone on the planet, from animals to plants to humans to their respective and occasionally mutual habitats, are part of a singular, nonhierarchical, global ecosystem—the ecosphere.[131] Within ecosystems, all beings have innate value and subjectivity—and humans are equal, and only equal, with every other inhabitant of the world.

The ecology theater these principles also define is predicated on connection. Whereas landscape theater performs the division between humans and nature, ecology

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[128] Commoner, *The Closing Circle*, 27.

[129] Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 27.

[130] *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 27 October 2014.

[131] See also Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: rethinking environmental aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

theater thrives on immersion in the ecosystem. As a result, ecology theater resists—but does not conceal—the depiction of the ecosystem from outside of the ecosystem itself. Topically, ecology plays directly engage discussions about or issues concerning the ecosystem—and, frequently, humanity's abuse of the ecosystem—reflecting, at times, the array of historically specific perspectives humanity has adopted toward the ecosphere. Formally, however, ecology theater faces a series of complications, particularly with regard to the stage, where ecology performances may be limited by the proscenium frame or, at the very least, the "abstract containers" of theaters whose walls enclose the "hermetic worlds" of the stage—a place of localized perceptual and conceptual disconnection with the ecosystem.[132] In addition to the problem of the physical frame, the stage is also restricted to offering only representations of the ecosystem using, even at its most mimetic, select objects extracted from the ecosphere. This kind of ecological synecdoche once more risks confusing depictions of the ecosystem with the ecosystem itself, repeating the ruptures revealed by landscape theater. And so, most ecological theater performed onstage can adhere to ecological principles only with regard to the topics it explores. The natural "niche" for ecology theater, then, is not on the stage, but outdoors in the ecosystem itself. And so, to parallel the formal inquiry I undertake for landscape theater with ecology theater, it is necessary to move beyond the limits of the stage and into the realm of environmental performance.

[132] De Kerckhove, "A Theory of Greek Tragedy," 27; Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss*, 40. Here, I again invoke the caveat that I am referring to the absence of visible traces of the living ecosystem—once more, humans notwithstanding—on the stage.

Environment and Environmental Staging

The very name "environmental performance" seems to be made for ecocritical theater. Though the phrase was first coined by Richard Schechner and derived from the work of Allan Kaprow, the practice of "environmental theater," as Arnold Aronson argues, predates the work of experimental theater practitioners in the late 1960s and 1970s, among whom the term first took root, to describe a long theatrical tradition in which performance environments surround audiences to varying degrees.[133] "Basically," he explains, "the word *environmental* is applied to staging that is nonfrontal," in contrast with frontal staging exemplified by "[p]roscenium, end, thrust, alley, and arena stages."[134] Aronson notes that instead of positioning her at a distance from a physically framed stage, "Environmental performance places the spectator at the center of the event, often with no boundary between performer and spectator. The performance frame may be distant and indistinct, and it becomes increasingly difficult to exclude any space or action as non-performance."[135] At its most extreme, environmental staging may "immerse" audience members in worlds of performance.

This "immersive theater," a subcategory of environmental theater, eliminates the physical frame of the proscenium and, often, any other kind of physical divide between the audience, mise-en-scène and performers.[136] The physical frame, however, is not necessarily synonymous with the "performance frame" that Aronson mentions. When

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[133] Arnold Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 1, 195 [emphasis in the original].

[134] Ibid., 1.

[135] Ibid., 13.

[136] Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 21.

Kaprow first began to construct environments for his Happenings, he was, at times, moving beyond the "matrixed" mode of performance that consciously separates audiences and actors—in part by giving actors new identities as characters performing within a separate, imagined reality apart from the one in which audiences find themselves—and into what Michael Kirby calls "nonmatrixed performance," in which there is generally no fictive or otherwise exclusionary conceptual frame of place or character to divide performers from audience members ontologically.[137] The performance frame belongs to the matrixed mode of performance, loosely naming the conceptual structures that establish the differences, in most traditional theater, between the everyday world and dramatic worlds as well as between actors and the characters they play.

Although environmental staging techniques did not originate as an attempt to engage with ecological concerns or necessarily with the ecosystem itself—they are not, in short, synonymous with any sort of "environmental activism"—Schechner notes that "The theatrical and ecological meanings of environment are not antithetical. An environment is what surrounds, sustains, envelops, contains, nests."[138] Moreover, he adds that "environments ecological or theatrical can be imagined not only as spaces but as

[137] Kirby, "Happenings: An Introduction," in *Happenings and Other Acts*. Kirby further advises that "there is [not] always a clear line between matrixed and non-matrixed performing. The terms refer to polar conceptions which are quite obvious in their pure forms, but a continuum exists between them, and it is possible that this or that performance might be difficult to categorize. In other words, the strength of character-place matrices may be described as 'strong' or 'weak' and the exact point at which a weak matrix becomes non-matrix is not easy to perceive." Michael Kirby, *The Art of Time* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1969), 79.

[138] Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (New York: Applause Books, 1994), ix. Any attempt to discuss the ecosystem alongside the theater presents particular linguistic pitfalls where the word "environment" is concerned. As a result, I have chosen to use the word only to refer to specific environments or environmental staging rather than in any generalized sense, even to refer to, say, "environmental activism" or "environmental disaster" for which I prefer terms such as "ecological activism" or "ecological crisis." Throughout, I also use the term "terrain" as a broad, neutral stand-in for the term "environment," both to avoid confusion and to make use of the former's flexibility (e.g. urban terrain, forest terrain garden terrain).

active players in complex systems of transformation."[139] His definition presents a dynamic understanding of environments, theatrical or otherwise. Cheryl Glotfelty, however, explains that among ecocritics, "environment" is a contested term. "Ecology," in fact, rose to prominence among preservationists because "in its connotations, *enviro-* is anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that we humans are at the center, surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment."[140] The prefix "*eco-*," by contrast, is predicated upon relationships and interactions. Yet Schechner's consideration of environment aligns with a vigorous, even systemic space of engagement among any number of entities, living or otherwise.

It is in this spirit that Theresa May champions environmental theater's connection to an "ecological sensibility, with the potential to reawaken in audiences a sense of connection to the natural world."[141] Baz Kershaw too argues that "biocentric performance events that use an ethically principled immersive participation […] might dissolve the boundaries between performer and spectator to produce participants in ecologically responsive action which recognises and embraces the agency of environments."[142] Kershaw's carefully phrased caveat is worth attending to: environmental theater is no ecological panacea for the theater, but it may be a tool to understand better the formal capabilities of an ecocritical theater where both the landscape and ecology genres are concerned.

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[139] Ibid.

[140] Glotfelty, "An Introduction," in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xx.

[141] May, "Greening the Theater," in *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 96.

[142] Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology,* 316, 317.

Environmental staging may seem to be an odd performance strategy for landscape theater. The latter's strong reliance upon framing to demonstrate its representational distance from the natural world stands in diametric opposition to the absence of a physical frame in the context of performance environments, especially immersive environments. In landscape theater, this has particular ecocritical merit. If the immersive effect is created through virtual environments that depict nature—and by this, I mean interior, human constructed spaces of environmental performance that replicate, to some degree, the natural world—then immersion may create the illusion of total experience, of full integration into a "synthetic" world. This reflects the underlying anthropocentricity of, for instance, naturalism, which purports to present a total reality but offers only illusion, a virtual world. Immersed in such a world, audience members may be reminded of just how tempting it can be to mistake illusion for reality. But what offers this reminder? How, in other words, do landscapes offer a potentially reflective form of immersion?

Requisite for any piece of landscape theater, as I define the genre, is an element of metatheatricality, a self-reflexive gesture indicating its own virtuality, whether intentional or not. It is through this gesture that immersive staging makes landscape theater all the more ecocritical, for while environmental staging may remove the physical frame from a performance, in the case of matrixed performances (and I have limited the scope of this dissertation primarily to matrixed works), the performance frame—expressed, as I hope to demonstrate, through a number of performance elements—remains to remind the audience member of his or her division from the virtual environment. And so, if counterintuitively, in landscape performance, phenomenal experience is anti-ecological

but also powerfully ecocritical, revealing the illusion that human-created theatrical environments may replicate the world beyond—or flaunt humanity's attempts to replace that world with ones of their own making. In other words, in environmental landscape theater, the persistence of the performance frame is ecocritically productive.

For ecology theater, environmental performance offers a way to escape the formal limitations of the stage and, to a degree, alienation from the ecosystem, particularly when the performance environment in question is the ecosystem itself. At the most optimistic end of the ecocritical spectrum, outdoor, site-specific, immersive performances that directly engage ecological concerns—or at the very least, the ecosystem—may give audiences the chance to connect with the ecosphere not despite but through performance. Such performances would allow audiences to participate in productions that present the ecosystem within the actual ecosystem. Knowing that we can connect with, that we are able to feel a part of the ecosystem rather than apart from it is, by extension, central to humanity's involvement in ecological redemption, as is the knowledge that if humans do not contribute positively to the ecosystem, we will nevertheless suffer as a part of its destruction.

Of course, environmental theater guarantees no resolution to the problems of framing and mimesis inherent to almost every kind of theatrical performance. Environmental theater, even in the ecological genre, still risks the rupture of landscape. It was, after all, in the context of an outdoor, if not immersive, production that Trigorin saw the lake of *The Seagull* first as scenery and then as ecosystem in rapid succession. Nevertheless, Trigorin did have the excuse of a literal frame in the form of a proscenium to influence his semiotic ambivalence. Yet even absent this physical frame, the

performance frame persists. I propose, however, that immersive ecology theater occupies less a frame than a niche, sharing in the common environment of the ecosystem its participants already call home. And so, I use environmental theater to test the formal limits—physical and conceptual—of ecology theater, to see just what happens—to audiences, performances and encompassing these, the ecosystem—when the mimesis of the theater is pushed offstage and into the world.

The Lay of the Land

The first half of "Shifting Terrain" addresses definitions and examples of both the landscape and ecology genres in theater. In chapter one, I examine three major modern plays that both depict and criticize anthropocentric depictions of nature by isolating characters within synthetic, static worlds purposefully limited by the proscenium frame. These pieces, Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1895), Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind* (1890) and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1949), emphasize the metatheatricality inherent in any attempt to depict natural worlds—a metatheatricality landscape theater explicitly acknowledges. Nature itself is legible here only as spectacle. Chekhov, for example, utilizes framing to trouble the perceptual divide between habitable and aesthetic space within plays. Erecting a makeshift proscenium—which also happens to frame a lake—to delineate a play-within-a-play authored by the character Treplyov, Chekhov complicates the semiotic status of his own, pre-established landscape. Maeterlinck's landscape, which encompasses the whole of the stage, correlates the symbolist's belief in the artifice of the corporeal with the illusory worlds generated onstage. Beckett unifies the gestures of Maeterlinck and Chekhov, stranding his self-conscious characters along a

roadside landscape with a view—of the audience—reifying their status as figures onstage rather than sentient entities in a fully realized world. Notably, the works of symbolist playwrights, such as Maeterlinck and, arguably, Chekhov, alongside playwrights like Beckett, who was deeply influenced by the symbolists, pervade this chapter. This is due, in part, to the symbolist movement's inherent criticism of naturalism, which Una Chaudhuri has argued creates the illusion of total visibility. Naturalism disguises authority as authenticity, refusing to acknowledge that there are parts of existence it cannot represent.[143] Symbolists, who believe that the true locus of existence lies in the space of the soul, reject naturalism's material dependence upon and supposedly totalizing representation of the natural world. For this reason, landscape theater often aligns itself with the philosophies of symbolist works. Together, Chekhov's, Maeterlinck's and Beckett's plays provide important insights into the metatheatricality of landscape dramaturgy, in turn reifying the aestheticizing, anthropocentric effects of staging nature.

The second chapter builds on the notion that ecology plays, in contrast to landscape plays, define the world as a system of non-hierarchical relationships among living beings and their habitats. Furthermore, ecology plays point away from the insularity of the stage to the world beyond. Ecosystems themselves are the subjects of these plays. This chapter explores—topically and, to a degree, formally—ecologically oriented systems in three exemplars of modernist and postmodern theater, Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882), Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) and Heiner Müller's *Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial /Landscape with Argonauts* (1982/83). Tellingly, all of the pieces identified here feature eco-pathologies; some explore the contamination of particular ecosystems while others consider the broader systemic

[143] Chaudhuri, *Staging Place,* 80-81.

consequences of humanity's cultural, social and biological development. Ibsen traces a cycle of manmade pollution, questioning the ways realism situates individuals within societies and societies within ecologies. Chekhov, again, indicates a disruption in the ecosystem, this time directing his characters toward nostalgia for a smoothly functioning ecology—often overshadowed by their far greater nostalgia for a smoothly functioning aristocracy—symbolized by the cherry orchard. In Müller's so-called "synthetic fragment," the interrelated contamination of time, history and environment reveals the pervasive pathology of mankind, spreading out into the ecosphere and the realm of aesthetics, as first signaled through Müller's ironic inclusion of the term "landscape" in the play's title. I further argue that this category clarifies the critical utility of the distinction between landscape plays and ecology plays, and more accurately utilizes the systems awareness some theater theorists have erroneously linked to the idea of landscape.

In the latter half of "Shifting Terrain," I employ the critical definitions and analytical models of the first two chapters to investigate landscape and ecology in the context of a subcategory of environmental staging known as immersive theater. Immersive productions are structured as worlds that surround and directly engage audience members, often requiring audiences to become physically involved with the environment and action of the play. A number of ecocritics and performance theorists have issued clarion calls imploring theater practitioners to embrace environmental staging as a way to unite theater with the ideologies of ecology and environmental activism. I too argue that environmental theater staged outdoors in the ecosystem itself—whether atop a mountain or in the heart of a city—may help to narrow the divide between theater's

aestheticized worlds and the ecosystem. I question, however, the sweeping assumptions of this entreaty by challenging the notion that any form of immersive staging can overcome the perceptual distance between aesthetic worlds and the world beyond the boundaries of the theatrical event.

To this end, I first analyze two contemporary, environmental productions—specifically, Maria Irene Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977) and Punchdrunk Theatrical Experiences' *Sleep No More* (2003, 2011-present), an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*—that are also landscape plays. Both pieces require their audience members to walk through performance spaces while interacting to varying degrees with actors and elaborately realized sets, at times eliminating virtually any distance between the performer and the materiality of the natural objects and natural environments within the performances. Yet both plays are staged indoors, their "outdoor" environments synthetic, so that even when the objects audience members engage come from nature, these objects are marked by their removal from the natural environment, another instance of the "rupture" between the stage and ecosystem Chaudhuri describes. Although both performances limit the physical distance between audiences and the corporeal experience of theater, they are also insular, engaging only the synthetic environments created by performers and designers. Both of these productions fall in line with the virtuality of landscape rather than the immediacy of ecology, despite the absence of the divisive proscenium frame.

Conversely, the fourth chapter explores Robert Wilson's *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE* (1972) and Big House Theater's *Across* (2000), both of which apply ecological ideals by emphasizing theater's capacity to make direct contact with the

very ecosystems the plays themselves depict, narrowing the divide between aesthetics and ecology. Wilson's site-specific piece, performed twenty-four hours a day for seven days atop Haft Tan Mountain in Iran, is an extreme example of ecological and environmental immersion. *Across* moved its audience throughout Old City Philadelphia, incorporating historical and "everyday" spaces, whether concrete or organic, into a hallucinatory journey haunting the streets and corners of the neighborhood. While neither of these productions entirely eliminates the division between the construct of theater and the worlds theater depicts, this chapter ends by proposing that productions such as *KA MOUNTAIN* and *Across,* which, at times, limit and may even eliminate the mimetic distance of conventional staging in exchange for direct confrontation with the materiality of performance and the visceral experience of natural space, may be the best models for establishing a theater ecology capable of re-imagining itself within a vast, complex, cultural and corporeal ecosystem. These pieces reveal theater's capacity to engage with the ecosphere, in turn reinforcing theater's ability to limit the distance between audiences, worlds of performance, and the world itself.

Shifting Terrain

I have called this dissertation "Shifting Terrain" in part to signal what I hope will become a fundamental change in ecocritical thinking in the theater and, more broadly, in the ways we consider some of the most foundational—and anthropocentric—theatrical conventions. In the process, we must acknowledge theater's culpability in disseminating anthropocentric perspectives, even as we explore the potential for theater to assist with the resolution of a truly global problem. For almost three decades, theorists in the

humanities had already been exploring the ramifications of ecological thinking in relation to literature and the arts, among other fields, before theater entered the ecocritical conversation. It is not as if theater's conspicuous absence from ecocritical discussions can be accounted for by a dearth of conversation about the relationships between nature, theater and society. Theater has long depicted relations between humans and the natural world. But in large measure, these discussions have been uncritical and unreflexive, frequently employing anthropocentric assumptions devoid of any kind of ecological language and almost as little (and then, generally, unnamed) ecological awareness.

In addition to a shift in ecocritical thinking, I also hope to invoke a fundamental state of discursive instability. Although I have divided landscape theater and ecology theater into separate genres in order to clarify and structure the "terms," linguistically and ontologically, of theatrical ecocritique, my reasons are more complicated. Particularly where ecology is concerned, we are on unsteady ground. The application of ecological principles to the theater, which remains a humanist artform, and, more dangerously, the application of human attitudes—whether "properly" ecological or otherwise—to the ecosphere will always be less a slippery than a seismic affair. In other words, the problems of ecology extend far below the surface of the matter.

Baz Kershaw, who has also ventured onto the unstable terrain of ecocritical theater, has likened "writing about 'performance' and 'nature'" to "trying to trace the outline of the writing hand with the pen used in the writing."[144] Theater is a process in which humans imagine other, occasionally virtual, unworldly and otherworldly realms. It

[144] Baz Kershaw, "The Ecologies of Performance: On Biospheres and Theatres," in *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, Gabriella Giannachi and Nigel Stewart, eds. (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2005), 65.

is also a testing ground for ideas that may themselves break the confines of the proscenium and escape into the world. It is a human activity and, therefore, an ecological activity. And although many of its formal conventions also push the theater away from any sense of continuity with the everyday world, the theater's inherent engagement with materiality, the stuff of its composition, and, by extension, the natural world—with all of the weight I give the term "natural"—make it both an ideal and a treacherous artform through which to investigate ecocriticism, especially with an eye to critical vigilance and, perhaps, ecological redemption. So, I turn to the plays and performances that dominate the discussion to follow not because I believe that they are flawless exemplars of each genre, nor because I believe that they present a comprehensive overview of landscape theater and ecology theater, but, particularly in the case of the ecology genre, because they are complex and often problematic examples of ecocritical theater. As this dissertation weaves in and out of theater's narrow halls and broad streets, marvels at false lakes and stands upon real mountains, I will again borrow Kershaw's words to advise my readers to watch for unsteady ground, "listen up for the cracks," and please watch your step.[145]

[145] Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology,* 321.

PART I

SHIFTING GENRES:

THE PROBLEMS OF REPRESENTATION

IN LANDSCAPE THEATER AND ECOLOGY THEATER

Chapter 1

"the mirror up to nature": Landscape Theater[1]

Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind.

—Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*[2]

In one of the most famous pieces of advice about performance ever dispensed, Hamlet instructs a group of traveling players "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature," naming the stage as a place of reflection that shows the world its own "feature."[3] Although the "nature" to which Hamlet refers is of the behavioral variety, human nature, his direction applies to the more general work of much of the theater as well: to create a reflection of the outer world, even of the ecosystem, in full, multi-dimensional form onstage. But what happens when that reflection of the world, visible as the image in the mirror or the scene on the stage, seems to become more believable, more real or simply more desirable than the world itself? What, then, does the theater teach its audience members about fidelity to "nature"?

The interaction Hamlet describes also names, with uncanny precision, the work of the Claude Glass, the framed, black-mirrored tool landscape painters have used to visualize their picturesque images. This device and the landscape paintings it helped to

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[1] William Shakespeare, "Hamlet," in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Blakemore Evans and J.J.M Tobin, eds. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), III.ii.22.

[2] Simon Schama. *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 6-7.

[3] Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* III.ii.22. In context: "Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (III.ii.16-22).

produce are agents of the conceptual "rupture" that many erroneously believe divides humans from the non-human world, creating a false dichotomy of "nature" that distinguishes humanity from the rest of the planet's inhabitants.[4] These practices include many conventions of the traditional stage and its depictions of the "natural" world. Both landscapes and, often, the stage privilege the visual and utilize mimesis as a powerful, conceptual process; yet both also engage the material and phenomenal in complex ways. To paraphrase Simon Schama in the epigraph above, theater and landscape are both works of the mind that come from and return to the realms of all of the senses.[5] It is from these points of tension that landscape theater emerges.

Landscape theater criticizes the false "natural" dichotomy between humans and the ecosystem, as well as the theater's complicity in creating that disconnection. In doing so, landscape theater problematizes several aspects of the relationship between the theater and the ecosphere. Like the framed landscape painting, the proscenium-framed stage teaches audiences to see the world from a detached, privileged perspective. Add to this a self-reflexive critique of aesthetic convention and the landscape theater genre I propose becomes metatheatrical. Its characters are often physically and psychologically "stuck" within the frame. Their relationships to nature are complex at best, as they are alternately terrified, fascinated or mesmerized by it. And because they occasionally recognize that the "nature" they engage is artificial, comprised of props and scenic elements made by humans, landscape theater's characters often come to realize that they are also figures in

[4] Una Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be A Lot of Fish in that Lake': Toward an Ecological Theater," *Theater* 25:1 (Spring/Summer 1994): 23-31. Here, I use Chaudhuri's term "rupture" to define not simply the break between theater and the ecosystems it attempts to depict but also the broader disjuncture imagined by humans between themselves and the remainder of the ecosphere.

[5] Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* 6-7.

a synthetic, aesthetic paradigm; they are constructs and their worlds are aesthetic compositions. Landscape theater, therefore, is an inherently metatheatrical genre.

In the sections that follow, I explore the definitions and conventions of landscape theater by examining three canonical pieces from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries: Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind* (1890), Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1895) and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953). These plays, already familiar to discussions regarding theatrical landscape, test the limits of the theatrical frame, mimesis and semiosis, particularly when it comes to transforming plants, animals and terrain into "nature" onstage.[6] Tellingly, all three pieces also levy symbolist (or in the case of *Waiting for Godot*, symbolist-inflected) criticism of depictions of nature by targeting the tropes of naturalism.

The symbolist movement was predicated upon a rejection of the supposed "reality" of realism and naturalism.[7] In resistance to the failed promise of naturalism, which, in the words of Daniel Gerould, declared the world could be "fully known and accurately depicted," symbolists believed that the normally invisible, metaphysical realm wherein souls strive "towards their beauty and towards their truth" was the authentic

[6] See Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997); Una Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*; Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, eds., *Land/Scape/Theatre* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002); and Bonnie Marranca, *Ecologies of Theatre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[7] In "The Symbolist Manifesto," first published in *Le Figaro* on September 18, 1886, Jean Moréas writes, with particular regard to Symbolist literature, "in this art, the depictions of nature, the actions of human beings, all the concrete phenomena would not manifest themselves; these are but appearances perceptible to the senses destined to represent their esoteric affinities with primordial ideas." Moréas in Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 151.

reality of mankind, rather than the realm of the material.[8] Yet, because of its intangibility, this realm could be invoked and explored only indirectly, through poetry or painting.[9] Gerould notes that not long after Émile Zola, the putative father of naturalism, "was hailing the advent of 'real landscape' on the naturalist stage," symbolists like Maeterlinck, who was significantly influenced by the *Axël* playwright Auguste Villiers de l'Isle Adam, were "creat[ing] a new landscape of the mind" which rejected the "illusory nature of the phenomenal world."[10] At the center of this idea is the notion that both the natural world, as it is observed in daily life, and the world of naturalism, depicted as "real" through the artifice of the stage, are realms of truth revealed through illusion.

Zola in particular insisted, as Gerould explains, that "Preexistent scenery in the perceptible world of nature—constantly distorted by the conventions of the stage—must be made directly accessible to human vision."[11] And this is what naturalists sought, in the most literal manner possible, to bring to the theater. In a slip to the idiom of the picturesque, the "scenery of the world" is the language of anthropocentric nature, which extracts the desirable view of terrain and packages it, even before its final artistic depiction, as valuable strictly for its scenic properties. Yet this extraction is only partial at best. Una Chaudhuri argues that, despite its claims, naturalism merely creates the illusion of "total visibility," insisting that in naturalism authority masquerades as authenticity in

[8] Daniel Gerould, "Landscapes of the Unseen: Turn-of-the-Century Symbolism from Paris to St. Petersburg," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 303-321.

[9] Maurice Maeterlinck, "The Tragical in Daily Life," in *Modern Theories of Drama*, George Brandt, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 119.

[10] Gerould, "Landscapes of the Unseen," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 304.

[11] Ibid., 303.

the same way that nature masquerades as ecosystem.[12] Naturalism refuses to acknowledge that there are parts of reality it cannot depict. Symbolists begged to differ.

It is symbolism's rejection of naturalism and the replication of a dichotomous nature synthetically rendered onstage that align symbolism, in many instances, with the concerns of landscape theater. And so, together, Maeterlinck the symbolist, Chekhov, whom Arnold Aronson calls a "symbolist playwright trapped in a naturalist theater," and Beckett, whose plays, Martin Puchner argues, invoke the form of symbolist gestures but, Andrew Sofer concurs, "ultimately resist symbolism," offer nuanced criticism of naturalism and, in the process, form the foundation of the landscape genre in theater.[13]

I have proposed that every theatrical landscape is identifiable through its preoccupation with frame and composition, symbolism and phenomenal experience. But it is the last of these that seems to push against the conceptual abstraction of symbolism. And it is this resistance, in part, that differentiates landscape theater from the ideals of symbolist theater, because it is through this tension that landscape theater itself criticizes humanity's self-exile from the ecosystem and into the dichotomy of nature. In part, this clash is a direct result of any attempt to stage symbolist work, which rejects the primacy of the material world in favor of spaces of contemplation or "landscapes of the mind" within the material theater.[14] To clarify this idea further, I will return, for a moment, to landscape painting.

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[12] Chaudhuri, *Staging Place,* 198.

[13] Of Chekhov: Arnold Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 117; Of Beckett: Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-theatricality and drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 162; Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of* Props (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 15.

[14] Gerould, "Landscapes of the Unseen," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 318.

All three playwrights whose work I explore in this chapter consider the clash between materiality and the aesthetic sublime in terms of painting. In his 1896 essay "Small Talk on Theatre," Maeterlinck makes the following comparison between painting and the stage:

> The theater […] produces just about what would happen if you were to give substance to the subject matter of a painting and in doing so turn it into everyday life: If you transported its profound, silent, secret-laden characters into the midst of the glaciers, mountains, gardens, and archipelagoes where they appear to be, and if you yourself entered after them, an inexplicable light would suddenly be extinguished, and without the mystical delight you had previously experienced, you would suddenly find yourself in the situation of a blind man at sea.[15]

Maeterlinck identifies the problem of situating the sublime, conceptual abstraction of art—so valued by the symbolists, so essential to the formation of landscape—within the realm of the mundane. In his estimation, plays, these "paintings come to life," place the formal, almost ethereal symbolism of the fine or literary arts in tension with the heavy materiality of the theater.[16]

Chekhov was also concerned that too great a turn to the mimetic would ruin the aesthetic of his plays. Vsevolod Meyerhold recounts Chekhov's vivid illustration of this fear during a rehearsal of *The Seagull*: "There's a genre painting by Kramskoy in which the faces are portrayed superbly. What would happen if you cut the nose out of one of the paintings and substituted a real one? The nose would be 'realistic' but the picture would be ruined."[17] His worry about realistic noses on painted faces refers to the inconsistency

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[15] Maurice Maeterlinck, "Small Talk—the Theater (1890)," in *Symbolist Art Theories*, 145.

[16] Maeterlinck does suggest, "eliminating the living being from the stage," invoking by distant comparison, "the masks of the Greek tragedians." He further muses that perhaps the living actor might be replaced, in the future, with "a shadow […] a reflection […] a projection of symbolic forms, or a being who would appear to live without being alive." Ibid.

[17] Meyerhold quoted in Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss,* 122.

of aesthetic languages a simultaneously mimetic and symbolic theater may speak.[18] It also jibes with E.H. Gombrich's description of theater, in which "we can find the real couch side by side with flimsy imitations or furniture painted on a backdrop. Any one of these may become a sign to us if we question it for information about the type of object it stands for."[19] This ontological clash points to a tension between mimesis and semiosis as well as to a potential relationship between the two, in which mimesis precedes semiosis. After all, before it can become a signifier, an object must first be legible as *something*. Of course, a slip in the opposite direction may be possible as well.

Andrew Sofer argues that Beckett's stage objects—from the turnip to the tree—hover frustratingly between the semiotic and the mimetic, "resisting symbolism" because they possess no clear significative correlate.[20] Yet the entire world of *Waiting for Godot* may have been inspired by a painting, specifically, David Bradby reports, a landscape painting by Caspar David Friedrich that depicts "two men looking at the moon"—the first glimpse of Didi, Gogo and one of the most resonant pieces of scenography to grace Beckett's stages.[21] Unlike his symbolist counterparts, however, Beckett seems less concerned with attempting to convey the sanctity of the mind or the sublimity of art than he is with pointing to the artifice of theater. Beckett cultivates a symbolist critique of

[18] Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss*, 122.

[19] E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 99.

[20] Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, 15.

[21] David Bradby, *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 120. Bradby also cites James Knowlson's work to link *Waiting for Godot* to Bosch, Bruegel and "one of Beckett's favourite painters, Brouwer" (115). Additionally, Bradby reports that in his notebook, Beckett mistakenly refers to Friedrich as "K[aspar].D. Friedrich" rather than "C[aspar].D. Friedrich" (120).

naturalism to create a fully realized theatrical landscape, complete with the tensions and contradictions that mark some of the limits of nature and theater.

Theater may well reflect nature, appearing in some ways to mimic the two-dimensionality of painting, particularly within the picture-frame proscenium, but both nature and the stage are composed of solid stuff—actors and properties, trees, rocks and lakes. Landscape theater navigates this complex terrain, tracing the ways that theater, like a "painting come to life," enacts and, at times, resists its conventions while depicting the awareness of a world that has already been abstracted into a natural "other" that is both sublime and terrifying. In *The Blind*, Maeterlinck challenges scopic privilege—with questionable success—in the morass of a spiritual failure that can be accessed, ironically, only through sight on the material stage. In *The Seagull*, Chekhov demonstrates the transformative pull of the proscenium frame, which turns anyone and anything—from lakes to people—across its stage-side threshold into aesthetic entities. And in *Waiting for Godot,* Beckett shows his audience the lie of any theatrical world that designates the stage as a place of nature, its ground fertile, its boundaries unlimited by revealing the barren stage—"the Board"—and the empty hallways that lie beyond the picture-frame proscenium.[22] Together, these plays represent a rich history of theatrical engagement with nature. They also offer an equally fruitful critique of the manner in which the structure of modern theater, through both its literal and semiotic frames, limits its own engagement with the natural world and, perhaps, influences its audience members' relationships to that world both inside and outside of the theater.

[22] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 55.

"I'd be able to show you only through the signs": The Landscape of the Unseen in Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind*[23]

Dim light first reveals the hopeless figures that populate Maurice Maeterlinck's symbolist meditation *The Blind*. Stranded on a sylvan island in the midst of "A very primeval northern forest, eternal in its aspect, under a heavily starred sky," the blind believe that they have been abandoned by their priest-guide.[24] But he sits "At the center" of both the stage and the circle of the blind, "deep in the night[,] […] wrapped in a large black cape. His totally motionless head and shoulders, slightly tilted back, are leaning against the trunk of a huge, cavernous oak."[25] As the blind will discover before the piece ends, their erstwhile guide is dead, his eyes as unseeing as their own. In the meantime, "Tall, funereal trees—yews, weeping willows, cypresses—cast their faithful shadows over them [the blind]. A tuft of long, sickly asphodel blooms in the night, not far from the priest. It is extraordinarily dark, despite the moonlight which, in spots, tries to filter through and dispel for a moment the shadows of the trees."[26] In the end, the blind are left with nothing but sounds—the relentless approach of footsteps through "dead leaves" and the crying of a child, the only sighted figure in the piece, in ominous revelation of impending death.[27]

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[23] Maurice Maeterlinck, "The Blind," trans. Alba Amoia in *A Theatre Anthology: Plays and Documents,* David Willinger and Charles Gattnig, eds. (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1990), 42.

[24] Ibid., 33.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 53-4.

Allegorically, *The Blind* seems to point to a recurring symbolist theme: metaphysical blindness dooms those who fail to turn the inner eye to the life of the spirit. Without guidance, the blind are unable to navigate what is a spiritual rather than corporeal realm, incapable of fleeing the damning presence that approaches. Scopic limitation leads to physical—and, in this symbolic realm, psychical—immobility. The only sighted human, a baby, is too young to lead them, and so they await their approaching doom. Normally, Daniel Gerould explains, in symbolist dramaturgy, "blindness [is] a badge of insight," because it shuts out the corporeal realm. In return, blind figures are offered expanded access to the "landscape of the mind." In *The Blind,* however, Maeterlinck reverses this trope. "I'd be able to show you only through the signs," the Young Blind Girl tells the First Blind Man, but she cannot.[28] They are blind, in a symbolist play, even to signifiers. At the core of the symbolist ethos is the belief that the "true" space of human existence lies with the spiritual rather than the physical. Symbolist theater represents internal worlds in the same way that naturalism claims, dubiously, to replicate the corporeal world; but, for symbolists, the corporeal world is already a sort of landscape, a physical *and* metaphorical reflection of the "true" world of the soul compressed within the synthetic realm of materiality. If Maeterlinck's play already exists within a metaphysical landscape, then his blind are spiritually, not physically, stricken—at least in principle. But this allegory unfolds on the corporeal stage.

Read in the light of Maeterlinck's formal description of theater as "a painting come to life," which places its intangible, "secret-laden characters" among the all-too

[28] Ibid., 42.

tangible materiality of the stage, *The Blind* is still an allegory, but one exploring figural space in tension with the material terrain that is characteristic of Maeterlinck's *oeuvre* but uncharacteristic of the symbolist aesthetic.[29] The natural mise-en-scène of *The Blind* suggests a green world made strange, even sinister, almost as if the audience sees it through a darkened, perhaps Claudean glass. In this space, the blind become like painted figures awakened into the terrifying realm of wild, material terrain—objects, not subjects, that are therefore (still) unable to return the gazes of their spectators. They are not of this "Island," this stage to which they have been carried and, by extension, not of this world.[30] Instead, they are outlines, ideas forced into the bodies of characters with actions and backstories and a predicament far too heavy for their newly and awkwardly material forms to bear, trapped at the edge of the sea.

Maeterlinck's objections to the overwrought mimesis of theater, particularly apparent in naturalism, constitute an explicit criticism of the illusion of accessibility, of material presence generated through naturalism. And so, the complicated tension between naturalism and symbolism on display in *The Blind* further reveals the dynamics between mimesis, semiosis and phenomenal experience that help to define the landscape genre. But Maeterlinck goes further than this, extending his complaints beyond naturalism to include the materiality of theater as a whole. How, he seems to ask, can a sublime concept, akin to the perfect images rendered in the Claude Glass, translate to the physical realm of the stage? *The Blind* is one potential response, the study of a painting come to life—a landscape play.

In *The Blind*, landscape is more than a backdrop for the figures populating

[29] Maeterlinck, "Small Talk—the Theater (1890)," in *Symbolist Art Theories*, 145.

[30] Maeterlinck, "The Blind," in *A Theatre Anthology*, 42.

Maeterlinck's dramatic world. Rather, the limits of the world, established in part through the rough terrain of nature and in part by the boundaries of the stage, seem to exert a restrictive pressure on their movements, as if the audience is privy to a thought experiment testing the limits of the landscape paradigm, the stage and the soul. And yet the immobility of the figures onstage, caused mainly by their blindness, effects a frame around the piece that is also responsible for the creation of a bounded stage-image. In keeping with the scopic obsession of the landscape ethos, the sightlessness of the figures populating *The Blind* acts to generate not only the theatrical frame and physical boundary of the piece but the apparent absence of identity that balances the blind precariously on the line between being characters, with more fully developed histories and concerns, or simple figures, with mere titles rather than names. It is, finally, within the context of scopic obsession that the world of *The Blind* becomes one in which nature is visible only as a threatening, utilitarian or aesthetic force, lacking innate value.

The Blind also poses a series of particular challenges as a landscape play. Landscapes are, in part, things of fine art, simulacra that appear to replicate, whether through paint or plants, an image of the natural world rather than the world itself. For the first staging of *The Blind* in 1891 at the fifth program of the short-lived Theatre d' Art in Paris, Frantisek Deák explains: "The stage was in a bluish semi-darkness, an effect which [Adolphe] Rette [the play's director] achieved by putting colored glass in front of lights. Some critics complained that they could not see or hear anything as the actors spoke softly and unexpressively in this light."[31] Seeing the world lit through blue glass again evokes the idea of the Claude Glass, but the ethereality of the image Deák describes still

[31] Frantisek Deák, "Symbolist Staging at the Théâtre d'Art," *TDR* 20:3 (Sep. 1976), 119.

stands in tension with the physicality of the stage and actors. Yet this is precisely the trope that *The Blind* turns on its head. Rather than placing heartily manifested characters against an ostensibly natural backdrop rendered through paint or other *trompe l'oeil* effects, Maeterlinck offers an abundant natural materiality, particularly in comparison with the work of his fellow symbolists. He sends his characters back into nature, transformed by the vision of landscape. It is the tension between the depiction of nature and its reality that defines the core of landscape theater, and this is precisely what Maeterlinck drives at. *The Blind* is as much a demonstration of the difficulties of staging the poetic sublime as it is a criticism of naturalism.

The landscape frame of *The Blind* derives primarily from its spatially static characters. In his 1894 essay "The Tragical in Daily Life," Maeterlinck called for the invention of a "static theatre," hoping to find a formal technique that would eliminate the distracting materiality engendered by preoccupation with dramatic action.[32] Instead, Maeterlinck yearned to draw into his work the profundity of the psychological which, in his estimation, blooms most fully in the absence of action. He argues, "Indeed, it is not in the words that are found the beauty and greatness of tragedies that are truly beautiful and great […]. And indeed the only words that count in the play are those that at first seemed useless, for it is therein that the essence lies."[33] In stillness, without the complication of superfluous stage business, the true life of drama resides. Maeterlinck elaborates:

> I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his armchair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him; giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting, without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows and the quivering voice

[32] Maeterlinck, "The Tragical in Daily Life," in *Modern Theories of Drama*, 118.

[33] Ibid.

> of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny […] motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or "the husband who avenges his honour."[34]

This principle of static performance is a key factor in the development of landscape plays. As Gerould puts it, within the "topography [of] the psyche," symbolist figures often remain immobile, fearing or simply unable to move beyond their grounded existences.[35] Their stillness establishes the frame of the scene, demonstrating that dramatic landscapes are defined, like their painterly counterparts, by the human gaze. In Maeterlinck's dramaturgy the audience members alone—not the figures of the play—are privy to the landscape view.[36] Like any other powerless figures depicted in a landscape, Maeterlinck's characters stare back at their spectators sightlessly, more than images but less than fully realized beings—or, really, even characters.

In keeping with Maeterlinck's ideals for the "Static Theatre," the blind are also generally immobile throughout the piece. This stillness creates a kind of frame around their actions despite the absence of the proscenium frame in adherence to the symbolist aesthetic. Both of these elements combine to generate another characteristic of landscape

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Gerould, "Landscapes of the Unseen," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 307.

[36] Here, I deliberately use the term "figures" rather than "characters." Maeterlinck keeps before his audience the challenges of the flesh the blind face in material reality. The residents of this island struggle with their embodiment so much so that they have only titles—First Blind Man, The Sixth Blind Man, A Young Blind Girl, The Mad Blind Girl—rather than names. But as tempting as it is simply to say that the blind are two-dimensional figures, what the audience witnesses instead is the struggle of poetic tropes to become three-dimensional individuals struggling with the sudden reality, as Maeterlinck describes it, of "glaciers, mountains, gardens, and archipelagoes." As their struggles continue, the figures begin to differentiate, offering deeper and more revealing glimpses into their respective personalities, from those who retain some shred of optimism about their situation to those who imagine nothing but doom, and from those who blame to those who regret. Maeterlinck, "Small Talk—the Theater," in *Symbolist Art Theories*, 145.

theater, particularly, the audience's sense of alienation from the action—aided in no small part by the dimness, as Deák reported, of the scene before them, perhaps in ironic balance to the scopic privilege the audience experiences in contrast to the blind figures onstage. Finally, and most significantly within the context of the landscape genre, the characters experience a sense of terror and, therefore, alienation from the natural terrain that surrounds them, an extension of the symbolist tension between sublime aesthetic ideals and the materiality of the stage.

Moreover, Patrick McGuinness argues, Maeterlinck actually made frequent use of "stage effects," accentuating the materiality of his theatrical worlds relative particularly to the scenography of some of his symbolist colleagues:

> In Maeterlinck's theatre, agency and expression are taken from language and its human user and transferred to the world of things: objects, sounds and off-stage space are prominent driving forces in his plays. He sought to replicate symbolist values—hiddenness, ambiguity, uncertainty—at the level of staging, set, props and lighting, by fully mobilizing the theatre's physical resources. In so doing, he showed himself ready not just to use but to *exploit* the very "material side" of theatre that his fellow Symbolists disdained.[37]

Anton Chekhov was even inspired by the "sea and lighthouse in the distance" of Maeterlinck's scenography during a staging of *The Blind*—which suggests that at least some level of visibility was possible during the performance.[38] More significantly, Chekhov's recollection and McGuinness's insight reveal the sense of presence, of physicality that Maeterlinck's symbolist world, at odds with the physical stage, generated.

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[37] Patrick McGuinness, "Mallarmé, Maeterlinck and the Symbolist *Via Negativa* of Theatre," in *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage*, Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 158.

[38] Geoffrey Borney, *Interpreting Chekhov* (Australia: ANU E Press, 2006), 148.

Scopic privilege also becomes an unstable sign on Maeterlinck's landscape stage. On the one hand, Maeterlinck's blind characters remain closer to their sublime origins through their sightlessness. On the other hand, the characters are clearly disadvantaged by their blindness. Without the redemption of true spiritual insight, the blind are less blessed than they are imperiled. Added to this, and despite *some* degree of scenographic texture, the dim lighting of the stage Deák describes suggests that the audience too had limited visual access to the stage world. And so, Maeterlinck turns the blindness of his figures onto the audience as well, reminding all that the world around us is, in contrast to the realms of naturalism, unknown and unknowable, even while increasing the gap between the reality of the theatrical landscape and the knowable world outside the theater's doors.[39] The instability of these elements combines so that, as Ashley Taggart argues, "Maeterlinck's natural symbols, despite their prominence, offer no compensatory certainties. His natural phenomena resist any concise metaphorical values we may wish to assign them."[40] What they do offer, however, is a point of ambivalence that helps to define the complex treatment of nature on the landscape stage.

Maeterlinck's blind figures cannot see and, therefore, cannot negotiate the terrain before them. Nature becomes dangerous, unpredictable and threatening, providing a tangible, physical threat to characters trapped within a labyrinth of rocks, trees and

[39] In some cases, the boundary would not have been the theater but nature itself. Arnold Aronson explains: "The Symbolist theatre artists, in certain instances, rejected the physical theatre in order to move into the temple of nature, to move into the forest. Of course, as with so many revolutionary movements, the rejection of the established order, when seen in retrospect, was far from complete. Just as with [Maurice] Pottecher's outdoor stage [for Theatre du Peuple], the move into nature most often meant little more than the recreation of the stage structure in a park setting. But even so, part of the frame—the architecture of the theatre building—was eliminated so that nature itself became the frame, thereby incorporating the spectator rather than erecting a barrier." Arnold Aronson, "Avant-Garde Scenography and the Frames of the Theatre," in *Against Theatre*, 29-30.

[40] Ashley Taggart, "Blind Process: Maeterlinck's The Sightless," *Modern Drama* 37:4 (Winter 1994), 1.

weeds. From an ecocritical perspective, *The Blind* performs the incompatibility of art with ecosystem, of depiction with everyday experience. Landscape plays, in short, replicate aspects of landscape painting as a form, demonstrating how the conventions of landscape art alienate viewers from the world around them. Landscape plays implicitly criticize the division between humans and other species nature names by depicting and, therefore, emphasizing this division.

During a brief flower-picking scene in the latter half of the piece, a floral scent on the breeze elicits fleeting hope that the blind group might be able to triangulate its location: "There are flowers; there are flowers around us!"[41] When the flowers fail, as improvised utilitarian objects, to offer the blind a more precise sense of their location on the Island, these flora become, instead, aesthetically valuable objects. In a semi-successful attempt to impress The Young Blind Girl, The Sixth Blind Man "stands up slowly and, bumping against bushes and trees, goes gropingly towards [a cluster of] asphodels which he uproots and crushes as he moves."[42] The "sickly" and "soft" flowers exemplify the polarizing essence of nature in the symbolist lexicon. As the Young Blind Girl pleads with the Sixth Blind Man on the flowers' behalf, "I can hear you breaking the green stems! Stop! Stop!" the First Blind Man calls out, "Don't worry about the flowers, think about getting back!"[43] Some of the flowers are trampled and the remainder picked, only to lead their recipient to declare, as she winds them into her hair, "I think they're flowers for the dead… ."[44] This interaction gets to the heart of the disjuncture between

[41] Maeterlinck, "The Blind," in *A Theatre Anthology*, 45.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 46.

nature and humanity in *The Blind.* At best, nature offers itself as utilitarian or aesthetic, and when it fails in both regards, it is worthless.

The danger of natural entities also emerges as a result of the characters' scopic disadvantage. "It would be better to stay put," the Second Man Blind from Birth advises the Sixth Blind Man, who concurs, "I tried to get up, there are thorns all around me; I don't dare stretch my hands out further."[45] Everywhere, hazards invisible to the blind threaten. "[A]n uprooted tree and masses of rock" separate the men and women of the group, further isolating them from one another within the wilderness.[46] This ubiquitous sense of the natural as dangerous stands beside the anthropocentric sense of nature as significant because of its usefulness in the form of the one living being who might be able to guide the blind out of the forest. Although the majority of the animals portrayed in the piece are nocturnal birds—presumably represented through sound effects—whose sweeping approaches and abrupt departures signal increasing levels of foreboding, some of the blind also distrust a dog—and the script calls for a real, live dog, in one of the most extreme gestures Maeterlinck makes toward the material—who might act as a guide to lead them from the forest.

The dog offers a curious dynamic in a play that seems otherwise designed to focus on human contemplation. But the presence of the dog reads as if Maeterlinck is determined to test one more aspect of the material stage's—and nature's—instability. Initially, the arrival of the dog triggers jubilation: "Who is there?—Who are you?—Have pity on us; we have been waiting a long time! . . . (The dog stops and puts his front paw

[45] Ibid., 39.

[46] Ibid., 33.

on the blind man's knees.) Ah! ah! what have you put on my knees? What is it? . . . Is it an animal?—I think it is a dog? . . . Oh! oh! it is a dog! it is the dog from the home! Come here! come here! He has come to save us! Come here! come here!"[47] The First Man Blind from Birth then reasserts the hierarchical importance of humans relative to nature, declaring, "He will lead us anywhere we want to go; he will obey us […]."[48] Others, however, reject any natural assistance, arguing that they "dare not follow him [the dog]."[49] In the end—and in, perhaps, a show of ironic agency—the dog decides for them, placing his head in the dead priest's lap and refusing to move. Only a sighted baby remains to warn the blind of the inexorable approach of a dooming figure, but the infant cannot lead them to safety.

As the play draws to a close amid the whoosh of footsteps in leaves and the wails of the child, the blind seem no closer to escape—or enlightenment—than when the piece began. The Sixth Blind Man's quiet declaration, "I'm beginning to understand where we are… ," in response to the Oldest Blind Woman's suspicion, "It seems to me that we've been here for centuries," hint instead at the underlying metatheatricality of the play. As their predicament draws—one way or another—to a close, the blind, these painted figures come to life, begin to suggest that they know not only where but who they are: characters on a stage, trapped within natural scenography and an invisible theatrical frame. "Have pity on us," they cry to an invisible entity, unseen even by the audience.[50] And the scene fades to black.

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[47] Ibid., 47.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 54.

In the dark world of his play, Maeterlinck's blind figures lack literal and figurative perspective. They become, as a result, inmates of the world they inhabit. They are trapped within the stage's inescapable frame and unable—as are the tiny figures occasionally found in landscape paintings—to return the gaze of the audience. In this sense, they are apt symbols for the landscape phenomenon. Without recourse to the scopic sublime, nature becomes terrifying to the blind and the natural world becomes an enemy. *The Blind* reminds us, as does the landscape genre more broadly, that in overestimating the value of the scopic, we may fail to see both the forest *and* the trees. The play performs the incompatibility of art with ecosystem, of depiction with everyday experience and, on the other side of the coin, the potential incompatibility of the conceptual and material. In short, as a landscape play, *The Blind* replicates many of the formal characteristics of landscape painting, demonstrating that the conventions of landscape art alienate the viewer from the ecosystems it depicts, particularly by presenting the natural world as either an aesthetic and utilitarian cache or uncivilized space dangerous to humans until and unless it is brought under human control. Nature exists, according to landscape, either to serve humanity or to endanger it. This relationship between theatrical framing and ecosystemic alienation is even more explicitly articulated through the proscenium frame of Chekhov's *The Seagull* and, specifically, through the mechanism of another "little symbolist play"-within-a-play that Chekhov, Maeterlinck's admirer, penned himself.

"Four acts, a landscape…": Framing the "Landscape of Symbols" in Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*[51]

In 1895, Anton Chekhov wrote to his friend, the publisher Aleksei Suvorin, that he was working on "A comedy with three parts for women, six for men, four acts, a landscape (view of a lake); many conversations about literature, hardly any action and 185 pounds of love."[52] This play would become *The Seagull,* the purportedly naturalist jewel of the Moscow Art Theater. Within *The Seagull*, though, is a symbolist play-within-a-play written by the character Treplyov in the manner of Maeterlinck's work, which Chekhov reportedly "greatly admired."[53] As his play is about to begin, Treplyov stands at the lip of his stage—the lake Chekhov mentions in his letter to Suvorin, made visible as a stage by a freestanding picture-frame proscenium—to declare, "This is what I call a theater. Curtain, downstage, upstage, and beyond that empty space. No scenery at all. The view opens right on to the lake and the horizon. We'll take up the curtain at eight-thirty sharp, just when the moon's rising."[54] Nature, in Treplyov's estimation, seems to be nothing, "empty space" that constitutes "no scenery at all," almost as if the

[51] Anton Chekhov, *A Life in Letters*, Rosamund Bartlett, trans. and ed., Anthony Phillips, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 336.

[52] Chekhov, "October 21, 1895," in *A Life in Letters*, 336.

[53] Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 82.

[54] Chekhov, *The Seagull (Stage Edition Series),* Laurence Senelick, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 51; The MAT production of the play would have demonstrated this nested proscenium effect. Contemporary directors, however, have frequently reconfigured the stage, situating *The Seagull's* audience around the "lake" for the first half of the performance (Andre Gregory), for instance, or drifting further into the realm of abstraction and away from the rigid frame of naturalism (Andrei Serban in 1980 and Hirowatari Tsanetoshi in 1993, both in Japan). Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss*, 129. Arnold Aronson, "The Scenography of Chekhov," *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, Vera Gottlieb and Paul Allain, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 142 145; Laurence Senelick, "Director's Chekhov" in *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, 182.

natural world disappears entirely in the face of his symbolist aesthetic. In the context of the theater—or, at least, his symbolist theater—Treplyov seems to say that if there is no painted scenery, there is no scenery at all and, therefore, no world, theatrical or otherwise.

At the end of Treplyov's playlet, his romantic and authorial rival Trigorin observes, "The scenery was beautiful. There must be a lot of fish in that lake."[55] In two sentences, Trigorin reads the same "space"—the lake that disappears under Treplyov's symbolist gaze—both as "scenery," easily pulled into the language of an anthropocentric theater, and simply as a lake. In response to this moment, Una Chaudhuri argues, "*The Seagull* pictures the rupture between nature and culture precisely through the image of a stage," further noting, "The point that Chekhov is slyly making through Trigorin and the fish—namely, that the discursive formations of nature and art are now so utterly disjunct as to be nonsequiturs […] ."[56] Chaudhuri subsequently refers to Raymond Williams' observations about naturalism: "In a stricter historical use naturalism is an artistic method in which a particular environment is reproduced, of course as accurately and fully as possible, not because it is an observed feature but because it is a causal or symptomatic feature."[57] The notion that within naturalism the environment of any play must emerge from and through the social circumstances of the drama directly yokes natural

[55] Anton Chekhov, "The Seagull," *Plays,* Elisaveta Fen, trans. and ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1951), 133.

[56] Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in that Lake,'" in *Theater*, 25-26. This is not the only moment when Trigorin equates the outdoors with the stage. Later, he tells Nina that, after finishing a piece of writing, he "run[s] to the theater or go[es] fishing," both sources of entertainment Trigorin seems to regard as equally matched. Chekhov, "The Seagull," in *Plays*, 70.

[57] Raymond Williams, "Social Environment and the Theatrical Environment: The Case of English Naturalism," *English Drama: Forms and Development,* Marie Axton and Raymond Williams, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 205. See also Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 26.

environment to landscape, again establishing the anthropocentric orientation of both. I have already indicated that Chaudhuri's analysis of *The Seagull* in pursuit of an ecology theater is ecocritical rather than ecological and, more particularly, beautifully articulates why *The Seagull* should be a part of the landscape genre—in addition to offering a superb argument regarding the need for a landscape genre in theater to begin with. There is, however, more to the story of *The Seagull*'s place in the landscape genre.

Much as Maeterlinck does in *The Blind,* Chekhov pits the materiality of naturalism against the evanescence of symbolism in *The Seagull*. Yet "nature" is a critical part of Treplyov's—and Chekhov's— mise-en-scène. Treplyov synchronizes the beginning of his play with the rising of the moon, and, as I will discuss in a moment, his symbolist script is filled with references to nature. At the same time, Treplyov ignores the effect of the proscenium frame that, in a process reminiscent of that of the Claude Glass, appropriates natural space and turns it into a backdrop for his play, his disavowal of "scenery" notwithstanding. Further complicating this conflict, as it does in *The Blind*, is the materiality of the theater. The tension between the aesthetic rupture, enacted by naturalism through Trigorin, and the uncanny absurdity of setting a highly conceptual symbolist work, a "subject from the realm of abstract ideas," within what is not only material, theatrical space but also an "everyday" place central to the lives of every character in *The Seagull* again reveals the landscape elements that structure Chekhov's play.

I argue that these tensions make *The Seagull* a part of the landscape genre in theater. But whereas in *The Blind* the theatrical frame is implicit, visible only through the characters' immobility, *The Seagull* has not one but two highly visible picture frame

prosceniums. The plays—and there are multiple plays underway simultaneously in *The Seagull*—that unfold between these frames demonstrate the landscape effect that emerges from the tension between the material and the conceptual as well as the capacity of the theatrical frame to transform not just nature but humans into symbols. The latter phenomenon is particularly visible through the transformations of Nina and Treplyov, the only two characters to pass—literally for the actress Nina, figuratively for the playwright Treplyov— through the smaller proscenium of the symbolist play-within-the play as *The Seagull* progresses. Chekhov complicates this process even further by explicitly pointing to the artifice of the broader "world" of *The Seagull*, one already enclosed within its own larger proscenium. This juxtaposition of both material nature and the materiality of the stage with the ethereality of symbolism points again to territory explored in Maeterlinck's *The Blind* and, moreover, to Chekhov's own complaints about aesthetic clashes stemming from the real noses of naturalism that Stanislavski more than once succeeded in placing on the painted faces of Chekhov's symbolist works.[58] In *The Seagull*, Chekhov stages this conflict, with Treplyov as an apparent stand-in for his own struggles as a "symbolist trapped in a naturalist theater."[59]

Throughout *The Seagull*, Chekhov sets up a tantalizing struggle of aesthetics, pitting Treplyov's symbolist play and his arguably more sophisticated symbolist ethos primarily against those of the naturalist Trigorin. In a moment that lays out Trigorin's place within the spectrum of aesthetic allegiances, he tells Nina:

> I have a feeling for nature, it arouses a sort of passion in me, an irresistible desire to write. But you see, I'm not a mere landscape painter, I'm also a

[58] Aronson, *Looking Into the Abyss, 122.*

[59] Aronson, "The scenography of Chekhov," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, 134.

> citizen of my country; I love it, I love its people. As an author, I feel I'm in duty bound to write about the people, their sufferings, their future—and about science, the rights of man, and so on, and so forth.[60]

Earlier associating Trigorin with Zola, Chekhov clearly places Trigorin in the naturalists' camp.[61] Here, the role of the "landscape painter" seems, in Trigorin's mind—and perhaps Chekhov's as well—to belong to a lower artform than the work of the naturalist, who must forge a link between his environment and the advances of society with clear political undertones linked to country and citizenship. This, in contrast to Treplyov's impromptu screed against naturalism prior to Nina's performance in his symbolist playlet:

> When I see the curtain rise on a room with three walls, when I watch these great and talented people, these high priests or a sacred art depicting the way people eat, drink, make love, walk about and wear their clothes in the artificial light of the stage; when I hear them trying to squeeze a moral out of the tritest words and emptiest scenes—some petty little moral that's easy to understand and suitable for use in the home; when I'm presented with a thousand variations of the same old thing […] well, I just have to escape.[62]

When Treplyov finally speaks in defense of his own form of theater, he asserts, "We don't have to depict life as it is or as it ought to be, but as we see it in our dreams," an ethos aligned with Chekhov's own stance in favor of symbolism and against naturalism.[63] Chekhov believed "life as it is," in the words of Robert Brustein, is "life as it should *not* be."[64] But Chekhov's attitude toward naturalism forms merely one part of the tension

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[60] Chekhov, "The Seagull," in *Plays*, 150.

[61] Chekhov, *The Seagull*, 53.

[62] Chekhov, "The Seagull," in *Plays*, 123.

[63] Ibid., 126.

[64] Robert Brustein echoing David Magarshack in *The Theatre of Revolt* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 138-39.

between the conceptual and the material in *The Seagull.* Like Maeterlinck, Chekhov accentuated the conflict between the abstraction of the sublime, aesthetic imagination and the vagaries of the material stage. Even when Chekhov's character Treplyov turns to a supposedly neutral space—"nature"— to perform his work, both seem to run headlong into the undeniable materiality of nature. Trigorin again provides a counterpoint to Treplyov's denial of materiality as the naturalist playwright blithely compares theater to fishing, both activities through which he can "relax" and "forget himself," as if the two pastimes and, moreover, the two settings exist solely for human entertainment. Theater and nature are, in Trigorin's philosophy, equivalent. Treplyov, however, struggles to reconcile the insistent presence of the one in the face of the ethereality he desires from the other. This problem is once more generated both by and from within the play, compounded by the theatrical frame—although Trigorin does not seem to need a theatrical frame to reap the enjoyment he wants from, for example, the lake. The frame of nature is, for him, adequate perhaps because he sees it as an aesthetic frame that is itself equal to the proscenium, again echoing the notion that nature is visible, *valuable* only in aesthetic or utilitarian capacities.

In the theater, the frame identifies any space, object or figure it contains as special, "other." Nina the actress becomes Nina the symbolist wisp—she goes so far as to claim that there are "no living characters" in the play—and the lake becomes a dark backdrop for the glowing, red eyes that stare back out of the nothing of Treplyov's stage.[65] And yet both Treplyov and Nina will become as trapped within this abstract world as Treplyov fears he will be within the enclosed, naturalist stage. In both cases,

[65] Treplyov concurs with Nina's assessment. Chekhov, *The Seagull*, 55.

however, it seems that there is no escape—for them or for any character. This is the message of the landscape stage: any figure that enters its proscenium becomes permanently altered by the aestheticizing frame.

Although Chekhov's use of landscape in *The Seagull* correlates in several ways to that of Maeterlinck's in *The Blind,* the frame-within-a-frame of *The Seagull's* double proscenium could either suggest that the world outside of the frame is somehow more "real" or "natural" than the world within or offer a reified understanding of the alienating, virtualizing effects of the proscenium frame, particularly when it encloses the naturalist stage as it did in the first performances of *The Seagull*. Chekhov emphasizes the alienating effects of the stage frame not only through Trigorin's comments about the lake, but several times throughout the whole of *The Seagull.* The mystical text of Treplyov's play provides one of the first distancing moments. Nina delivers the lines:

> The men, the lions, the eagles, the partridges, the antlered deer, the geese, the spiders, the silent fishes of the deep, starfishes and creatures unseen to the eye—in short, all living things, all living things, having completed their mournful cycle, have been snuffed out.[66]

Against—within the world of the play—a "real" lake with noisy wildlife, Nina must assert the artificial absence of an animated nature. What remains are a view of the land, topography and nothing else but a will-o-the-wisp actress/spirit speaking across the boundaries of time and space from the end of the world. Although Treplyov denies that this view constitutes "scenery"—it is, he observes, a view of "nothing"—but incorporates natural elements such as the moon and water into his dramaturgy, Trigorin can think of the view as nothing other than aesthetic within the context of the performance, despite shifting the status of the space once he reimagines the lake as a good fishing hole.

[66] Chekhov, "The Seagull," in *Plays*, 129.

Quickly, the proscenium frame standing before the lake—and when *The Seagull* reaches its final act, the frame has stood for years in stage-time—becomes an eerie, but no less transformative reminder of the strange otherness established by the very act of framing. Shortly after the performance of the playlet ends, Dorn, the doctor, pleads, "I think the curtain might be raised now. This place gives me a sort of eerie feeling."[67] The mere specter of the theatrical curtain as a division between worlds is enough to push Dorn into a state of unease over its uncanny implications—made all the more powerful in the context of *The Seagull* by the fact that Dorn is himself a character framed by another proscenium and another set of theater curtains just outside the frame of his vision. Henri Lefebvre recalls Hegel's "ironic" claim that "Behind the curtain there is nothing to see," but qualifies this statement, adding,

> Unless, of course, "we" go behind the curtain ourselves, because someone has to be there to see, and for there to be something to see. In space, or behind it, there is no unknown substance, no mystery. And yet this transparency is deceptive, and everything is concealed: space is illusory and the secret of the illusion lies in the transparency itself. The apparatus of power and knowledge that is revealed once we have "drawn the curtain" has therefore nothing of smoke and mirrors about it.[68]

Leaving the mystical, theatrical barrier in place would further mystify the space behind it, still imbuing that space with the otherworldly powers of the stage. And indeed, the space behind the curtain constitutes another world, uncannily overwriting the lake, the woods and their native inhabitants with the strangeness of the symbolic aesthetic that the entire audience (both Treplyov's and Chekhov's) has just witnessed glaring back in the form of two burning, red eyes—special effects—from the other world. As long as the curtain

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[67] Ibid., 133.

[68] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 287.

hangs down, Dorn believes, that "other" world lives on. Three acts and two years later (again, in stage-time), the frame still stands until one night the schoolmaster Medvedenko suggests, "we might as well tell them to pull down that stage in the garden. It stands there naked and ugly like a skeleton, with the curtain flapping in the wind," adding, "You know, last night as I was walking past it, I thought I heard someone inside—crying."[69] That person is likely Nina, drawn again into the vortex of the proscenium's alternate reality. Despite its degraded state, the frame continues to haunt the terrain it alternately reveals and conceals by transforming nature into landscape, a highly concentrated, symbolic realm where anything and everything remains possible, at least conceptually.

All of this unfolds, of course, on an "actual" stage, which Chekhov makes explicit throughout the play. It is at this point which critics' tendencies to read the whole of *The Seagull* as a landscape can be both understood and challenged.[70] Through a series of metatheatrical gestures, Chekhov clarifies that, at moments, we are viewing a double frame, and the scaffold of the playlet's proscenium stands as a skeletal reminder. Not long after Nina's performance in Treplyov's play, Trigorin essentially plans the remaining script of Chekhov's play. Speaking of Nina in a thinly veiled summary of her own life, he concocts

> A subject for a short story: a young girl, like you, has lived beside a lake from childhood. She loves the lake as a seagull does, and she's happy and free as a seagull. But a man changes to come along, sees her, and having nothing better to do, destroys her, just like this seagull here.[71]

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[69] Chekhov, "The Seagull," in *Plays*, 165.

[70] See Bonnie Marranca's *Theatrewritings* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984), 196-98.

[71] Chekhov, "The Seagull," in *Plays*, 151.

The seagull Trigorin indicates, the spoils of Treplyov's day shoot along the shore of the lake, is of course a stand-in for Nina; but it is what Nina does next, and Chekhov's telling stage direction, that indicate the full force of his metatheatrical engagement, as well as his use of landscape. After Trigorin leaves the scene, praising Nina's performance and speaking of her promising future as an actress, "Nina: *advances to the footlights*" and *"after a few moments' meditation*" declares *"*It's a dream!"[72] It is unclear which set of footlights Chekhov refers to here—those of Treplyov's stage, or those of Stanislavski's, an ambiguity that follows Nina for the rest of the play as she oscillates between understanding herself either as a person, a performer or something entirely other between the realms of naturalism and symbolism.

For the remainder of the play, Nina and Treplyov are caught within the formalizing structures of the frame and the footlights, as are the landscape of Treplyov's play and, finally, *The Seagull* itself. After Treplyov shoots the gull that acts as the impetus for Trigorin's "short story" of Nina's life, Treplyov confesses to her "I did something nasty, I killed this gull today. I lay it at your feet," concluding, "I'll soon kill myself the very same way."[73] Nina resolves this moment, at least temporarily, by rejecting Treplyov and refusing to own the iconography he offers, responding, "you talk in code, symbols of some kind. And this gull is obviously a symbol too, but, forgive me, I don't understand it… (*Lays the gull on the bench*.) I'm too ordinary to understand you."[74] By the end of the play, however, Nina has succumbed to the symbolic, to the pull that the

[72] Ibid.

[73] Chekhov, *The Seagull*, 68.

[74] Ibid.

proscenium exerts over her life and the life of Treplyov, the only two characters in *The Seagull* who cross the threshold of the picture-frame standing before the lake. Neither return as themselves, as if, like the lake that Treplyov regards as "nothing," they have slipped into the realm of aesthetic oblivion. In the first moments of *The Seagull*, just prior to the beginning of Treplyov's play, Nina confides, "I'm drawn here to the lake, like a gull."[75] After the world of the play completely overtakes her, Nina slips toward metaphor and madness, babbling,

> I'm a gull. No, that's wrong…Remember, you shot down a gull? By chance a man comes along, sees, and with nothing better to do destroys… Subject for a short story. That's wrong… (*Rubs her forehead*.) What was I saying? I was talking about the stage. I'm not like that now…Now I'm a real actress, I like acting, I enjoy it, I'm intoxicated when I'm on stage and feel that I'm beautiful.[76]

Meanwhile, Treplyov—the other character most connected with the proscenium and a desire to experience the landscape within it—is dead. Neither can live within the kind of landscape ideals framed by the playlet, nor can they live outside of them.

The play's *coup de grâce* is twofold. Treplyov, driven to utter despair by his artistic vision and its incompatibility with the nature of his world—in other words, by the fact that he is a symbolist figure quite literally trapped, at least in *The Seagull's* initial incarnation, within the frame of the naturalistic Moscow Art Theater—kills himself.[77] Just before the play reaches this climax, however, Trigorin completes his naturalist rejection of symbol and, in this case, the outcome of the play. Earlier, he had called the dead gull Treplyov presents to Nina—essentially an analog of her own corpse—a "lovely

[75] Ibid., 54.

[76] Ibid., 94.

[77] Here I borrow the phrasing of Arnold Aronson's suggestion that Chekhov is a "symbolist trapped in a naturalist theater." Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss*, 117.

bird," seeing it again only for its material beauty. After the gull returns to him, stuffed, he denies that he ever ordered it to be taxidermied, exclaiming "Don't remember! Don't remember!" as he gazes at its corpse.[78] Trigorin once more "forgets himself" both in the face of overwrought symbolism—one he cannot, as a naturalist character, recognize—and in response to a natural figure made aesthetic monstrosity through its implicit comparison to Nina. At the end of the play, Treplyov is dead, Nina is mad, and Trigorin, a stranger in a symbolic if still material land, is an inarticulate amnesiac.

The tension in these scenes advocates neither a symbolist nor naturalist aesthetic, as the flaws in both become clear: The "dream" of symbolism cannot be staged because theater too readily asserts its materiality. The totalizing notion of "nature" naturalism advertises cannot be staged either because the aestheticizing function of the stage immediately eradicates the authenticity of the same "natural" materiality it attempts to portray. Landscape, however, enters somewhere in between.

Though debates about *The Seagull* have often focused on whether Chekhov's loyalties lay with naturalism or symbolism, these arguments have left aside the fact that both modes are aestheticizing extremes. When Stanislavski populated *The Seagull* with "the naturalistic barking of dogs and croaking of frogs,"[79] Chekhov believed the effect backfired and became "incensed at Stanislavsky's pedantry, reminding him that 'the theatre is art.'"[80] Though, in time, Stanislavski would also claim that "naturalism for the sake of naturalism […] [is] anti-artistic," his definition of "naturalism" eventually shifted

[78] Chekhov, *The Seagull*, 96.

[79] Bella Merlin, "Which Came First: The System or 'The Seagull'?" *New Theatre Quarterly* 15:3 (Aug. 1999), 224.

[80] Ian Maxwell, "More than 'Dead Pet Acting': Legacies of Stanislavsky," *Sydney Studies in English* 30 (2004), 96.

away from particular concern with the environmental "atmosphere" of performance toward the notion that "inner truth, the truth of feeling and experience… is justified by the inner experience of the actor."[81] Like symbolism, naturalism would attempt to depict the internal life of the human manifested through his or her surroundings, but depiction of this space within the proscenium lies in the realm of landscape.

It is through the frame of landscape and its attendant aesthetic critique that Chekhov's *The Seagull* also becomes an ecocritical play. The proscenium frame suggests, in this case, a world divided from humanity, one of strange, "natural" beings peaking out from the insubstantial scenery into which nature has been translated by the gaze of the audience and a few pieces of wood. The frame pushes the characters of both Chekhov's and Treplyov's plays further from the pieces' respective—though in the case of Treplyov's play-within-the play, mutual—audiences than does Maeterlinck's *The Blind* while retaining the uncanny sense of otherness that lurks through Maeterlinck's "natural" terrain, a strangeness that alters Treplyov and Nina so profoundly that, by the end, both are driven, essentially, "wild" by their transgressions into the ambivalent space of nature-as-scenery on the other side of the proscenium. *The Seagull* also relies, through both Trigorin and Treplov, on the notion that nature has worth only in its beauty or utility. Even this worth is deflated to a degree by the staging history of the piece. In the hands of the naturalist Stanislavski, the stage became fully capable, or so the illusion would suggest, of replicating the "nature" of the ecosystem but with far more refined aesthetic flair. In each of these capacities, Chekhov demonstrates the distancing effect the frame of the theater and the anthropocentric assumptions of naturalism, criticized in part through

[81] Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Handbook,* Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, trans. (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1963), 101.

symbolism, have on the relationship between the theater, its audiences and the ecosystem. As a result, the landscape theater outlined in *The Seagull* is also an ecocritical theater. Chekhov created his metatheatrical landscape in 1895. By the middle of the twentieth century, Samuel Beckett would merge Chekhov's proscenium frame with Maeterlinck's symbolist terrain, uniting landscape and the stage in mutual criticism of both forms. Whereas Chekhov depicts characters transformed by the proscenium frame, Beckett offers characters trapped, knowingly, within it.

"They do not move": Performing the Limits of Landscape in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*[82]

At different times throughout his life, Samuel Beckett explicitly credited Caspar David Friedrich's well-named landscapes *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* and *Man and Woman Observing the Moon* as inspirations for *Waiting for Godot*.[83] According to biographer James Knowlson, Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Blind Leading the Blind*, evocative of Pozzo and Lucky, if not Gogo and Didi, and *The Land of Cockaigne*, also a landscape, influenced Beckett as well.[84] But it is Paul Cezanne, hailed by none other than the cubist Picasso as "the father of us all," who may have most influenced Beckett.[85] Cezanne once defined landscape "as something by definition unapproachably alien," an object made inaccessible through aesthetic perfection. Beckett would come to explore

[82] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 10.

[83] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 236, 342.

[84] Ibid., 538-39.

[85] John Pilling, *Beckett Before Godot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 132-33.

this idea in *Waiting for Godot* as a symbolic correlate to the strangeness of the existential alienation Didi and Gogo experience. [86]

It is this aspect of landscape, which Cezanne noted at the genre's purported waning, that Beckett brings to his most famous work and through which his stage becomes the terrain of the character as "other." Yet it would be a mistake to assume that Beckett's existentialist contemplation for the stage was written in homage to landscape painting. Instead, like Maeterlinck and Chekhov, Beckett uses the limitations of landscape in *Waiting for Godot* in part to indicate the synthetic insularity of the proscenium stage and its correlates in modern theater. Nevertheless, something more is underway in *Waiting for Godot.* In contrast to most of the characters of *The Blind* and *The Seagull*, and the largely passive elements of nature that surround them, *Godot*'s Didi and Gogo seem at the very least to suspect that they are characters and that their landscape is the stage—an awareness evident only briefly among any of the characters of the other two plays. Before I pursue this argument, however, I want to explore the ways in which *Godot*'s approach to many of the aspects of landscape theater is similar to that of *The Seagull* and, particularly, *The Blind.*

As Maeterlinck explains, even the most thoroughly painted figure, the most well-rounded characters become strange in the midst of the real "glaciers, mountains, gardens, and archipelagoes" with which he challenges his "profound, silent, secret-laden characters."[87] This very scenario—substituting a primeval forest for glaciers or gardens—plays out in *The Blind. Godot*'s Didi and Gogo are hardly silent, but there is an uncanny

[86] Cezanne quoted in Pilling, *Beckett Before Godot*, 132.

[87] Maeterlinck, "Small Talk–the Theater," in *Symbolist Art Theories* 145.

similarity between their predicament and that of Maeterlinck's blind—so much so that I want to propose that *Waiting for Godot* is, in part, a revision of the metatheatrical world Maeterlinck's figures inhabit, but with a key caveat. *The Blind* is a symbolist landscape of ideas struggling to transcend the mundane in a relentlessly material theater. Chekhov's *The Seagull* is a clash between naturalism and symbolism played out, once more, on the material stage. But Beckett's minimalism empties depiction of everything that may be unnecessary, decorative or authorizing. Here, landscape emerges through the emptiness of the stage punctuated by a few material markers. In *Godot,* the tension between symbolist and materialist ideologies is less visible, in part because Beckett does not share Maeterlinck's symbolist sensibilities. Instead, as Martin Puchner explains, "Beckett takes the form of symbolism, namely the act of isolating gestures, without the belief in their symbolist meaning. […] These and many similar repetitions indicate that Beckett's play draws on the symbolist investment in isolated gestures without believing in their rev[e]latory promise."[88]

Absent the symbolist ideology of *The Blind*—which, as I have argued, rubs uncomfortably against Maeterlinck's criticism of the difficult but unavoidable materiality of theater—*Godot* still approximates much of *The Blind*'s mise-en-scène stripped down to its most basic elements. *The Blind*'s rocks and looming tree, the resting place of the dead priest, become the single rock and tree of *Waiting for Godot*. And although the characters of *Godot* are all sighted when the play begins, by the end, Pozzo is blind, a significant marker of the loss of power in a play that still, as with all plays in the landscape genre, privileges vision. Gogo cries out "God have pity on me," echoing the

[88] Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright*, 162.

plea, "Have pity on us; we have been waiting a long time!" of the blind.[89] Also evident here is the primary dramatic action—or lack thereof—in both pieces: waiting. The blind wait for the return of their (already) deceased priest as Gogo and Didi await the arrival of Godot. But there are differences as well. While the tree, for instance, is associated with the death of the priest in *The Blind*, in *Godot*, the tree can offer no such relief because Didi and Gogo cannot die—their action is simply to fill stage-time while waiting, with even less of the artifice of some sort of "real" life than Maeterlinck gives his characters.

More significant is the level of self-awareness that Didi and Gogo begin to exhibit. Whereas only one character in *The Blind* articulates any suspicion that he and his companions may be someplace other than a primeval island forest—and even then only in an abundantly veiled manner—and *The Seagull*'s Nina reveals the same, only with the most subtle of verbal slips—and even then in the grip of madness—Didi and Gogo seem to know where they are. When Didi whispers to Gogo "At me too someone is looking […]," the invocation of the audience is apparent. This is more than a clever metatheatrical joke on Beckett's part. In contrast to the other revenants of the landscape stage and in apparent contradiction to much of the landscape paradigm I have established thus far, Didi and Gogo, I argue, have begun to see the broader prospects of their surroundings: the theater. More surprisingly, I will argue, this development enriches both the landscape genre and its ecocritical impact.

Moments into the first act of *Waiting for Godot*, Didi and Gogo walk the stage, surveying their terrain. Gogo observes, "Charming spot. (*He turns, advances to front,*

[89] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 47; Maeterlinck, "The Blind," in *A Theatre Anthology*, 47.

halts facing auditorium.) Inspiring prospects. (*He turns to Vladimir*.) Let's go."[90] The inspiring prospects he literally sees are, of course, the audience members. And mimicking a classic thread of vaudevillian humor, he's not impressed enough to stick around. While this moment reveals that Gogo already sees more than meets the typical character's eye, it also offers the first hint that the terrain Didi and Gogo occupy will not be comfortably encapsulated behind the artifice of the fourth wall—at least not entirely.[91] The aesthetic "landscape" within which Didi and Gogo are trapped marks the extent of the dramatic terrain available to the characters. One might imagine that the indirectly framed landscape of *The Blind* extends beyond the space Maeterlinck depicts for the audience, but his characters never enter this extended space simply because, immobile, they cannot. The surrounding dramatic space of *The Seagull* extends well beyond the metatheatrical frame-within-a-frame Chekhov offers his audience—though he points to this broader dramatic space metatheatrically through Nina's joyous declaration in the glow of the stage's footlights (which stage remains an open question) that she has found herself in a dream. *Godot* differs significantly in that the limits of the landscape Didi and Gogo inhabit seem to end at the edges of the stage. And so, while *The Blind* achieves its framing through the inactivity of its characters—who, like Didi and Gogo, may be refugees from a painting—and may well be set in the "real" world, and *The Seagull* nests its most evident frame within another world and another frame, beyond the proscenium of

[90] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 12.

[91] It is tempting, particularly with reference to Beckett's affinity for all things vaudevillian, to refer to Didi and Gogo as performers. But it is a crucial part of my argument that no such elision between character and actor is possible here. Actors do not, despite any doubts one may harbor, *live* on the stage. But characters, conversely, exist *only* on the stage (or page). Una Chaudhuri makes a similar claim regarding Gogo and Didi in "Who is Godot? A Semiotic Approach to Beckett's Play," *Approaches to Teaching Beckett's* Waiting for Godot, June Schleuter and Enoch Brater, eds. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1991), 138.

Waiting for Godot, there is nothing but the apparatus of the theater. The translation of the conventions of painting into the performative remains in *Godot* through the concerns of framing and the utter simplicity of the play's scenography, but Beckett's Didi and Gogo (et al.) are less like Maeterlinck's painted figures and more like *The Seagull*'s lost characters. Whereas, however, Chekhov's characters are trapped psychologically, Beckett's are physically bound by the stage, fully revising the landscape paradigm of painting for the theater.

Most of the elements of landscape—framing, static presentation, scopic emphasis and natural elements—I have examined so far define *Waiting for Godot*'s mise-en-scène as they do the worlds of *The Blind* and *The Seagull*. In fact, Beckett insisted on a well-defined frame for his play. When Alan Schneider first directed *Godot*, he began a conversation with Beckett about staging the piece in the round, in part to conjure an image of Pozzo as a ringmaster.[92] Beckett objected to Schneider's plan—though, he says, he would grant the request if he *could*—maintaining that *Godot* needs "a very closed box."[93] This "box" is the stage enclosed by the proscenium frame, a clear boundary setting the limits, physically and metaphysically, of *Godot's* characters.[94] Within the context of the frame, visual emphasis remains the most significant mode for the play's reception. From the mention of Bishop Berkeley—who argued that humanity exists

[92] Schneider was interviewed regarding the matter in "Four in the Round," *Theater Arts* 41:4 (April 1957), 72-73, 91-93. Cited in Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider, *No Author Better Served*: *The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, Maurice Harmon, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 56, fn. 2.

[93] Beckett to Schneider in *No Author Better Served*, 12.

[94] The Roundabout Theatre's 2009 Broadway production of *Waiting for Godot*, with Nathan Lane as Gogo and Bill Irwin as Didi, while successful in so many other ways, violated this crucial edict with a set that spilled over the lip of the stage, beyond the proscenium and into the orchestra pit. While the actors on the whole maintained a rigorous sense of the limits of the stage-world, this scenographic element destroyed the sense of enclosure Beckett stipulates.

because God observes—in Lucky's speech, to Didi and Gogo's plea to Godot's boy, "You *did* see us, didn't you?" existence on *Godot's* stage is predicated upon the visual.[95]

The first in a series of interactions key to defining the space Beckett's "box" encloses in *Waiting for Godot* arrives moments into the first act of the play as Didi and Gogo try to get their bearings:

> *Estragon moves to center, halts with his back to auditorium.*
>
> ESTRAGON: Charming spot. (*He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.)* Inspiring prospects. (*He turns to Vladimir.*) Let's go.
> VLADIMIR: We can't.
> ESTRAGON: Why not?
> VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.[96]

Dramatic action, or the lack thereof, is reflected in the characters' physical action, or, again, the lack thereof. They remain in place because their prescribed dramatic action is "waiting for Godot." Just before this interaction, Gogo sighs, "Nothing to be done," referring, perhaps, less to finding some particular action to hasten Godot's arrival than to Didi's and his own inability to escape the dramatic fate or the space to which the apparatus of theater has condemned them.[97] When Pozzo wonders if perhaps they are all inhabiting "the place known as the Board," Didi answers that their surroundings are "indescribable […] like nothing. There's nothing,"—recalling Treplov's description of his own play's "stage"—before adding, with a nod toward the landscape tradition and Beckett's painterly sources of inspiration, "There's a tree."[98] While the presence of the

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[95] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 52. Berkeley argues, to paraphrase, that to be is to be seen. *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision.* Project Gutenberg. 1709. Accessed: 2009.

[96] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 10.

[97] Ibid., 7.

[98] Ibid., 55. See also Enoch Brater, "Talk about Landscapes: What There is to Recognize," *Modern Drama*

tree complicates the stage's status in Didi's mind, from a scenographic standpoint it also serves to reinforce the notion that they are indeed on "the Board" after all. Arnold Aronson observes that although "Samuel Beckett may have set each of his plays in an increasingly abstract space, […] there was always a signpost—from the literal tree by the side of the road in *Waiting for Godot* to the human mouth that is all that remain visible in *Not I*."[99] The tree becomes a grounding element in the open, empty theatrical space of the stage, asserting not simply its material but also its mimetic and, more complexly, semiotic presences as well. By offering the scene just enough specificity to make it an identifiable theatrical space, but not enough detail to make it "natural" or even naturalistic space, the tree embodies the idea of the scenic.

If, however, the tree alone is insufficient to identify the stage as the place of Didi and Gogo's interminable sojourn, Beckett offers a significant clue as to their whereabouts even earlier in the play. When Didi takes a bathroom break late in the first act, "*hasten[ing] toward the wings,"* Gogo directs him to the "[e]nd of the corridor, on the left."[100] The landscape of *Godot*, though not the space of the theater, effectively ceases to exist beyond the realm of the frame where, as the aesthetic theorist Carole Fabricant notes, "things bec[o]me inconceivable.[101] It is easy to miss Gogo's offhanded directions for Didi, in part because they are essentially incomprehensible within the naturalistic

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49:4 (Winter 2006), 502. The tree is itself a significant element of *Godot*'s stage and its relationship to the landscape paradigm I will examine at length later in this section; Didi's description of the stage is also an eerie echo of Treplyov's description of the natural elements within his own proscenium frame as "nothing," despite his reliance on the moon as a convenient and essential piece of scenery. Chekhov, *The Seagull*, 56.

[99] Aronson, *Looking Into the Abyss*, 6.

[100] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot,* 23.

[101] Carole Fabricant, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics,* Ralph Cohen, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 65.

paradigm that conditions many of modern theater's conventions. The "road" that Didi and Gogo ostensibly occupy should continue on beyond the frame of the stage. The frame, in other words, traditionally limits the view of the spectator but not the imaginary realm of the play's word. Not so here. The terrain, or rather, the landscape of *Godot* ends at the stage's sightlines. Didi's existence as a character, paradoxically, does not. It is as if the painted figures of Maeterlinck's symbolist idea travel not just into the picturesque spaces of mountain and archipelagoes but also into the functional, even gritty wings of the theatrical apparatus. Again, the stage and the landscape painting act as convenient, reciprocal metaphors for one another: beyond the frames of both, characters and their worlds become incomprehensible. And yet Beckett takes advantage of the materiality of his embodied character to carry Didi offstage and, bafflingly, into everyday space. But transgressing the persistent proscenium frame and the paradoxical space beyond carries repercussions for the characters, particularly at the beginning of each act and with the second appearance of Lucky and Pozzo. Because it is the responsibility of the characters of *Godot* to inhabit the play night after night, time offstage is time dangerously spent. Once the curtain drops, characters are subject to beatings, robbery, deprivation and—if things go very badly, as they do for Pozzo—blindness. Life out of the frame is no life at all.[102]

Pozzo's blindness, incidentally, raises another question about Didi and Gogo. Although they too spend a rough night offstage, they emerge less battered than Pozzo. Once the tramps have fully absorbed Pozzo's strange transformation and his even stranger amnesia regarding that transformation, Gogo declares, somewhat wistfully,

[102] So where *do* Pozzo and Lucky go when they are offstage? One possible answer: into the imagination of the audience, itself a more treacherous and terrifying nowhere than even the stage's wings.

"They all change. Only we can't."[103] Two things distinguish Gogo and Didi from the other characters in the play at this moment. First, they seem to remember, as would the audience, their earlier encounter with Pozzo, when he was still in possession of his sight, even though Pozzo himself does not. Second, they endure their nightly trials without sustaining visible damage. Everything around them, from the other characters to, as I will discuss in a moment, the play's scenography—night falls, the moon rises, the tree sprouts leaves—changes as they remain the same. Something about Didi and Gogo is different.

Their strangeness extends beyond their ability to endure without further damage throughout the course of the play. They also seem to be able to access parts of the theater that would be inaccessible to conventional characters—even, and perhaps especially, the landscape characters I have explored thus far—both physically (Didi's distinctly un-euphemistic trip to the "bathroom") and visually. Though early in the play Didi imagines he sees a bog in the space of the auditorium, after Lucky's bombastic speech this image transforms.[104] In the second act, Didi and Gogo appear to gaze through the fourth wall—were this a world with walls—beyond the limits of the dramatic field and into the audience. There, they see "corpses" and "skeletons… A charnel-house! A charnel-house!" Gogo admonishes, "You don't have to look," but overwhelmed by the draw of the visual—and the terrible—Didi can only respond, "You can't help looking."[105] Not only do they look, they see, turning the gaze of the audience back upon itself in another stark departure from the conventional structures of theatrical viewership.

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[103] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 33.

[104] Ibid., 10.

[105] Ibid., 41.

This matter of seeing and being seen, and, moreover, the characters' awareness of this process give way, in time, to an even more surprising reversal of the usual landscape paradigm when nature—usually passive, present and, above all, distinctly depicted (not *even* natural)—begins to look back upon its beholders just as Didi and Gogo gaze back at their audiences. Staring at the moon late in Act I, Gogo laments that it looks "pale for weariness" at "climbing heaven and gazing on the likes of us."[106] Turning the tables on the directional control of the beholding eye, Beckett inverts the normal contexts of landscapes, making an element of anthropomorphized "nature"—the man in the moon, no less—active. For a moment, nature views and man is watched. Yet the audience remains, "corpsed" though it is, in an endlessly troubled and troubling cycle of viewership, subjectivity and objectification. With no hope of release from the eternal dramas of both nature and the depiction of nature—the show must go on, the moon and sun must rise—Beckett suggests that all things are trapped and entrapped by the lure of seeing and being seen. By maintaining a landscape perspective, and with it the false dichotomy of nature that divides humans from the surrounding world, we, like Didi and Gogo, become alienated from existence, attending to the scenery at a distance.[107] To understand better what this means, I will look to the "nature" of *Godot*.

Caught in a world composed of space yet perceived as image, Didi and Gogo turn to their surroundings to assess their mutual situation. Even here, Beckett makes clear that their world lacks depth, lacks even the metaphorical equivalent of a replicated nature. Of

[106] Ibid., 34.

[107] Here, I have in mind Fuchs and Chaudhuri's argument that for too long, the theater, "[l]ike Gogo, […] has attended to the worms and not the landscape." This statement, however, aligns landscape with the ecosystem and further ignores the fact that on the stage—unless something unusual has taken place—there are no (visible) worms to which the theater may attend. Fuchs and Chaudhuri, "Land/Scape/Theater and the New Spatial Paradigm" in *Land/Scape/Theatre*, 1.

course, this is *not* the natural world but one of the most self-reflexively virtual worlds to grace the modern stage, as the following interaction illustrates:

> ESTRAGON: All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! (*Looking wildly about him.*) Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!
> VLADIMIR: Calm yourself, calm yourself.
> ESTRAGON: You and your landscapes! Tell me about the worms![108]

The world of things, i.e. Gogo's "worms," and the world of the mind mark the boundaries of "landscape," endlessly caught within the oscillation between its status as both a conceptual and material space. The worms do not exist in the mise-en-scène of *Godot* because the literal and figurative ground of this world is "the Board." Worms do not—generally—thrive *on* let alone *in* the stage.[109] The same applies to the apparent famine sweeping the world of the tramps. Their food supplies have dwindled to nothing but a black turnip and a questionable carrot, perhaps because just as "the Board" cannot support annelid life, it cannot support plant life. Nothing grows in the soil of *Godot* because there is no soil, only the stage, its wings and the auditorium.[110] Didi and Gogo would be doomed to eventual starvation if not for the fact that they are characters feasting, like Hamlet, only on the air, promise-crammed though it may be.[111] Instead, Didi and Gogo will go on, night after night, waiting, playing out their existences as characters on the stages of the world until there is no longer a theater and, perhaps, no more world, as we know it, to speak of.

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[108] Beckett, *Waiting for* Godot, 39.

[109] Microbes excepted.

[110] This argument recalls Arnold Aronson's suggestion that Didi and Gogo cannot leave the stage because there is no door through which they can exit. Aronson, *Looking Into the Abyss*, 63.

[111] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.ii.

Yet the tree seems to play by rules that contradict those of the other natural objects depicted in *Godot*, as do Didi and Gogo relative to the other characters in the piece. When the tree seemingly springs to life between acts one and two—and in stage time "in a single night!"—Didi is incredulous: "Yesterday evening it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves."[112] This moment would be far less jarring, for the characters and certainly for the audience, were it not for the fact that in so many ways, *Godot* adheres faithfully to landscape conventions. Like the paintings that inspired Beckett, Didi, Gogo and friends are depicted as figures who spend their "lives" inside of a four-sided frame playing out the title of Friedrich's *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*. Nevertheless, the fact that their stage's moon looks back, and that their tree is three-dimensional and changing—not something painted trees normally are—places the play in a more complex landscape paradigm. Beckett, in other words, is not simply imagining what it would be like to challenge painted characters with a material world or, inversely, place embodied characters in a painted world, as the most conventional stages had done for some time. Rather, he is exploring the ramifications of one's return to the "natural" world after absorbing the distorted awareness of the Claude Glass, of the landscape perspective. Nature may thrive, but its independent existence is somehow as inconceivable as Didi's incursion into the wings or Gogo's confrontation of the audience.

Even this explanation of the tree's transformation, however, may be too simple. Later in the play, Didi again surveys the stage and declares, "Everything's dead but the tree."[113] How is it that the tree can survive, though apparently rooted in "the Board,"

[112] Beckett, *Waiting for* Godot, 42, 41.

[113] Ibid., 55.

while everything else on the stage withers away? At the beginning of this chapter, I mention Andrew Sofer's observation that "Beckett's theater insists on the nauseating 'thereness' of such things as boots, trees, and carrots—items that flirt with but ultimately resist symbolism."[114] Both *The Blind* and *The Seagull* grapple with the problematic relationship between symbolism, in particular, and the materiality of the stage. Naturalism has an equally, though less apparently, problematic relationship with materiality as well. Namely, naturalism relies on materiality to authorize its supposedly "authentic" reproduction of nature. Pushed to its most extreme, this argument suggests that naturalism constitutes a move not simply toward representing but toward supplanting nature, mimesis run amok. Both of these issues are central to landscape theater and, moreover, point to the ecocritical ramifications of the landscape genre. Although *Waiting for Godot* is less explicitly evocative of symbolism, naturalism or debates between the two than *The Blind* or *The Seagull*, *Godot*'s tree is a localized nexus of these debates devoid of their more particular ideologies or conventions. Una Chaudhuri explains that the tree is more deictic than symbolic, "a link between the audiences and […] an organic 'other world,' a world that includes, among (very few) other things, material nature."[115] Chaudhuri's implicit distinction between nature and ecosystem, between the ecosphere and the "organic 'other world'" that nature suggests, carries the implications of Beckett's resistance to symbolism into new territory.

"The Board," it seems, is incompatible with life. Nothing grows from the stage; nothing takes root between its planks. But in *Godot*'s dramaturgy, the tree is alive. The

[114] Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, 15.

[115] Una Chaudhuri, "Who Is Godot? A Semiotic Approach to Beckett's Play," in *Approaches to Teaching Beckett's* Waiting for Godot, 137.

problem of the tree reflects the loss of significative stability within the play and indicates one way in which a play might be ecological, namely by suggesting that something, anything, might be able to find a way toward life—or at least a way to point toward the world that exists away from "the Board." This inconsistency distinguishes *Waiting for Godot* from the other landscape plays I have examined so far because both *The Blind* and *The Seagull* are so relentlessly self-referential, so unapologetically insular. But *Godot*, even though it has the most rigorous, outsized framing of the three plays, points just for a moment beyond its own aesthetic self-involvement, beyond the theater and toward the world. This gesture neither dismantles the performance frame nor jeopardizes *Godot*'s status as a landscape play. To the contrary, it shows the landscape genre's ecocritical capacity and offers a tantalizing hint at what the ecological potential of theater might offer. Downing Cless explains that "Beckett takes an already hyper-separated nature and hyper-separates it again," so that "[t]hrough theatrical alienation, the audience may transcend actual alienation from nature."[116] This transcendence on the part of the audience—the ecocritical goal of landscape theater, which aims to make audiences aware of the aesthetic distance engendered by theatrical convention and the broader anthropocentric attitudes this distance perpetuates—does not translate to Didi and Gogo's transcendence of the stage. In the end, Beckett's tramps remain prisoners of the stage, immobile characters within a world suspended at the edge of what would, outside of the theater, be ecological blight. "I can't go on like this," Gogo laments. And in a sentiment

[116] Downing Cless, *Ecology and Environment in European Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 171.

that is perhaps as chillingly relevant for their audiences as it is for the tramps themselves, Didi answers, "That's what you think."[117]

Conclusion: Going On

The landscape genre in theater follows the formal elements of landscape painting, pushing the clash of the conceptual with the material to extremes within the theatrical frame. This frame is often, though not always, manifested through the picture-frame proscenium. Within its boundaries, there is, contrary to Stanislavski's claims, no nature and no "[l]ife on stage," only depiction.[118] Landscape theater enacts the alienation that framed depictions of nature, even and especially at their most material, generate between humans and the ecosystem. In short, landscape theater re-enacts the rupture dividing humans from the non-human within the false dichotomy of humanity and nature. In *The Blind* and *The Seagull,* clashes between symbolism, naturalism and the materiality of the stage help to generate the tension that defines the parameters of the landscape theater genre. *Waiting for Godot* shares these issues but reaches further into a metatheatricality that perfectly suits landscape. Specifically, *Godot* shows the audience just how far removed the world of the stage is from the natural world, though made of the same stuff and, to some degree, occupying the same dimensionality. It is, as Cless explains, the aim of ecocriticism to make humanity aware of the disconnection between people and nature aesthetic distance performs through media such as landscape theater. And it is through its work to make audiences aware of this disconnection that landscape theater—including plays like *The Blind*, *The Seagull* and *Waiting for Godot*—becomes an ecocritical theater.

[117] Beckett, *Waiting for* Godot, 55.

[118] Constantin Stanislavski, *Creating a Role* (New York: Routledge, 1961), 51.

But it is also in *Waiting for Godot* that landscape theater becomes ecocritical in another capacity. The familiar refrain, "I can't go on" belies the eternal nature of the tramps who inhabit Beckett's stage prison, because they can go on, and do, every night before audiences around the globe. They are characters who will endure as long as *Waiting for Godot* is read or performed. This is one of the most ecocritical statements that landscape theater can make: the ideal image persists in its state of framed perfection. The image is permanent. The idea is permanent—unless there is no one there to see it, no beholder to give existence to the painting or performance, no more world in which to make theater, no referent world to make theater's objects, whether mimetic or semiotic, coherent. In the end, landscape theater tells us, the existence of the stage's worlds, no matter how perfectly formed, how ideal, will die with us. And so, we—unlike Didi, Gogo, the blind, Nina, Treplyov and every character within the landscape frame—must move as the stage's inmates cannot.

But what if characters *could* move? What if they could, in the end, "go" beyond the walls of the stage and the insularity of the stage world? What might that mobility mean for a theater implicated in the attitudes that have helped to distance the stage and humanity itself from nature? What if, in short, there were a theater that rejected the dichotomy of nature altogether? This theater would, of course, have to grapple first with the sociocultural haze of anthropocentric movements like naturalism, which Williams and Chaudhuri explain are "anti-nature" because of a "character-soaked environmentalism [that] is anti-ecological," and then, perhaps more dauntingly, with conventional staging practices that attempt to push the stage-world relentlessly away not, now, just from nature

but from the ecosphere.[119] Neither task is simple nor straightforward, but if both can be accomplished, then a new genre of ecocritical theater that complements landscape theater will emerge: an ecology theater.

[119] Chaudhuri explains that "Raymond Williams distinguishes between 'illustrative' naturalism ('properly described in terms of "setting" and 'background"') and the 'symptomatic and causal environment in high naturalism,' in which 'the lives of the characters have soaked into their environment [and]...the environment has soaked into their lives.' But the sort of rupture between character and environment I am pointing to occurs not before or after but *within* this hyperenvironmentalist moment of naturalism. Because, as Williams makes clear, this hyperenvironmentalism is in the service of a *social* drama (in which the stage represents a space 'shaped by and shaping social history') it ignores —or even actively conceals—the 'non-social' parts of the environment. To put it bluntly, naturalism is anti-nature; environmentalism (in Williams's sense) is anti-ecological." See Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 26.

Chapter 2

"Life on the Stage": Ecology Theater

Life on the stage should be as it really is, and the people, too, should be as they are and not on stilts.

—Anton Chekhov[1]

Dancers frolic among uprooted pine trees strewn across a stage in Pina Bausch's 1984 *tanztheater* piece *Auf Dem Gebirge Hat Man Ein Geschrei Gehort* (*On the Mountain a Cry Was Heard*).[2] The scents of sap, of pitch, fill the theater as needles, "still lusciously green" fall to the ground.[3] But the pines "look like fresh corpses," laments Gitta Honegger, and she is angry "at Bausch" for resorting to such "deadly ruthlessness" in service of what is, in part, an ecocritical argument about the alienation of humans from the natural world.[4] Gabrielle Cody argues that the trees were sacrificed for "the mythical rendering of a catastrophic, global displacement" in a manner that she characterizes as "irresponsible, but not gratuitously so."[5] Where, then, is the line between reason and gratuity in ecocritical conversation, and, in the realm of theater more specifically, ecological performance? Where in the theater is the border between the voluptuous performance of ecological "displacement" or destruction—all to make what is arguably a sound, responsible ecological point—and the practice of what Baz Kershaw calls

[1] Chekhov quoted in Robert Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 142.

[2] Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance: Pina Bausch Presents 'Mountain,'" *The New York Times* 10 October 1985. *NYTimes.com* Web. 8 November 2014.

[3] Honegger in Gabrielle Cody, "Woman, Man, Dog, Tree: Two Decades of Intimate and Monumental Bodies in Pina Bausch's Tanztheater." *TDR* 42:2 (1998), 128.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Cody, "Woman, Man, Dog, Tree," in *TDR*, 128.

"ecological sanity"?[6] How, in other words, might theater act "responsibly" to represent and, moreover, engage the ecosystem?

If the (literally) corpsed pines of Bausch's stage are an indication of the clash between the ecological and theatrical concerns the stage can engender, a question mark might make an appropriate addition to the title of this chapter. As Didi and Gogo demonstrate, "the Board" is a poor environment to support life; the stage is a place of artifice, offering the illusion of life, sometimes through the performances of living beings, but it is not a place of life itself. Bausch's dead trees, like Gogo's absent worms, would seem to affirm the point. In the genre of landscape theater and, arguably, in most if not all matrixed performances, life "as it really is," life as Chekhov hoped to see it, never reaches the stage. Instead, audiences watch simulacra, specters, shadows and dreams—even if or when these resemble, uncannily, the denizens and environments of the everyday world, the ecosystem. In the landscape genre, these metatheatrically framed illusions allow artists, audiences and critics to identify the ways in which theater distances itself and its audiences from the ecosystem.

The genre of ecology theater, on the other hand, complements the work of landscape theater in the context of a broader ecocritical theater by presuming connections between living entities and their environments, including the non-living portions of their habitats. By exploring these connections, ecology theater also rejects the false dichotomy of nature that privileges humans above plants, animals and terrain. Finally, ecology theater also stipulates, by virtue of its status as human behavior, its own niche within the ecosystem, both in practice and in space; ecology theater is, in other words, less

[6] Baz Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 304.

enframed, relative to landscape theater, than it is situated, especially when an ecology performance is positioned within the space of the ecosystem itself. Although each of these principles applies both to the topical and formal concerns of ecology theater, the last is particularly relevant to matters of staging in ecology performance.

The ecology genre seeks both to theorize and stage theater as part of the ecosystem but resists depicting the ecosystem other than through or within the ecosystem itself. I have proposed that the stage is a space apart, a realm of insular strangeness that stands (at least conceptually), by virtue of self-imposed exile, outside of the ecosphere—the vast *oikos* or "home" that is the world.[7] To replicate the ecosystem on the stage without acknowledging the synthetic quality of this reproduction is to repeat the duplicity of naturalism; to replicate the ecosystem onstage while acknowledging the synthetic quality of such depiction lies within the purview of landscape theater. In formal contexts, ecology theater positions its priorities with the ecosystem and away from the stage altogether. And so, although the presence of dead trees onstage in Bausch's *tanztheater* performance certainly seems to reflect the "turn towards the literal" Una Chaudhuri stipulates for an ecology theater as part of a "programmatic resistance to the use of nature as metaphor," the collective deaths of a small stand of firs seem a far cry from the work of an ecology theater and just as far, for that matter, from the ethical practice of an ecocritical theater more generally.[8] The dead trees also do little to answer, at least in any

[7] I return here to the caveat that the living ecosystem may be visibly absent from the stage (humans excepted) but, in truth, pervades almost every place on the planet, at the very least microbially.

[8] Una Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be A Lot of Fish in that Lake': Toward an Ecological Theater," *Theater* 25:1 (Spring/Summer 1994), 29. As an aside, I want to posit that these trees really are not so different from, say, the pine lumber that comprises thousands of sets across the globe. It is even possible that the trees were cut into boards and used for just this purpose after the performance ended. This would suggest that it was the unprocessed form of the trees, their "corpses," and not their deaths per se that so upset Honegger and

positive sense, the main inquiry of Chaudhuri's call to ecology theater: "are we human beings—and our activities, such as theater—an integral part of nature, or are we somehow radically separate from it?"[9] In response to this question, the ecology genre seeks to reposition theater, both physically and ideologically, as part of the ecosystem.

In order to accomplish this task, ecology theater must identify a way to establish the ecosystem as a significant agent, rather than simply a topic, within ecology plays. Along with this aim, ecology theater must also incorporate humans into ecological discussions as subjects equal with (and only equal with—we are fauna, after all) every other species within the ecosystem or risk returning to the false dichotomy between the human and non-human deployed through the term "nature." Timothy Clark explains that, "In effect, 'ecology' names two different things, the one a natural science, the other, including 'deep ecology' and 'social ecology,' a speculative part of the humanities and social sciences."[10] In ecology, understanding social interaction within and among all species is essential to understanding ecosystems. Despite humanity's potential to adopt a critical purview of the world, there is no single or central entity that dominates the ecosystem, and no hierarchy of significance. "[W]e are *in* nature and a part *of* nature," declares R.W. Hepburn.[11] Although the term "ecosphere" might be better suited than the term "nature" in this case, he speaks to the core philosophy of ecocriticism. Joseph W.

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many others. If true, what might this distinction mean for an ecocritical and, more particularly, an ecology theater?

[9] Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be A Lot of Fish in that Lake,'" in *Theater* 27.

[10] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 152.

[11] R.W. Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty," in *British Analytical Philosophy*, Bernard Arthur Owen Williams, ed. (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), 290.

Meeker adds to this point, saying, "The social activism of those ecologists who participate in the environmental movement depends upon the ecologists' conviction that human beings are inseparable components of natural ecosystems, not merely observers, and they have an appropriate role to play in the biological environment."[12] This role—defined by Barry Commoner through his "Laws of Ecology," by Arne Naess through the deep ecology movement, by Gregory Bateson through his "ecology of mind," and by Félix Guattari through his "three ecologies"—resituates humanity's understanding of its place within the ecosystem to reflect an attitude of equality toward all of the inhabitants and elements of the planet, what Guattari calls "mental ecology."[13] Commoner, Naess, Guattari and Bateson each argue that adopting this ecologically inclined mindset may shape, in the broader populace, what Guattari calls a "social ecology."[14] This social ecology may, in turn, positively impact the ecosystem through, again using Guattari's term, "environmental ecology."[15] The nexus these systems form is non-hierarchical, with the ecosystem informing mindset and social action—and vice versa—as part of an ongoing process that helps to define the place, the niche of humans within the ecosphere.[16] It is for the ecology genre, then, to determine how best to represent the performance of this process within the theater.

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[12] Joseph W. Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: In Search of an Environmental Ethic* (Los Angeles: Guild of Tutors Press, 1980), 33.

[13] Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971); Arne Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess*, Alan Drengson and Bill Devall, eds. (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2008) 3; Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, trans. (New York: Continuum, 2008), 52; Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1972]). Guattari drew his inspiration for "mental ecology" and the "three ecologies" more generally in part from Bateson's "ecology of mind."

[14] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies,* 41.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 51.

Ecology theater can begin both to trace and to pursue the theater's engagement with the ecosystem through two complementary though only occasionally concurrent areas: subject and staging. Although ecosystems would ideally take on the role of agency within the ecology genre, this has not been the case for much of the theater's history. Instead, much of the social ecology that Guattari and others promote has been substituted in—and outside of—the theater simply with social anthropocentricity, still informed by humanity's assertion of its own primacy and demoting the ecosystem to figurative scenery. The fact that much of the performance of ecological issues in the theater has also occurred on the stage compounds this problem, relegating the ecosystem—or more accurately, its depiction—to literal scenery. And so, I turn to the theatrical canon in order to determine the degree to which ecosystems have been a matter of discussion central to the action of plays, often through ecopathologies such as pollution or deforestation, and when, though far more rarely, the ecosystem has emerged topically and formally as a fully formed subject, or agent, in the theater.[17]

In this chapter, I analyze three plays—Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People,* Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and Heiner Müller's *Despoiled Shore/ Medeamaterial/Landscape with Argonauts*—to explore the ways in which ecological

[17] I refer to the "canon" here not because I feel as if its works should be privileged above pieces that fall outside of the theatrical mainstream—to the contrary, experimental work offers a treasure trove of nuanced ecological thought—but because I believe that works in the canon offer some of the most significant challenges to ecological and proto-ecological thought. It is, in other words, the unsuitability of the canon to the task that offers the greatest potential to reveal that the ethos of ecology, in various and messy stages of its development, has been hiding in plain sight of audiences for many years. Additionally, Downing Cless, whom I reference briefly later in this chapter, has recently published a book examining ecological ideas in the European theatrical canon stretching back to ancient Greek plays. I discovered her book after the bulk of this chapter was written but find encouragement in our shared impulse to turn to the theatrical canon for ecological insight. However, though we share several basic observations about two of the plays here—specifically, *An Enemy of the People* and *The Cherry Orchard*—our readings often diverge in significant ways, as noted. See Downing Cless, *Ecology and Environment in European Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

ideas have informed the subjects of the theater with particular focus on how the ecological concepts addressed within the theater have evolved over time. Both *An Enemy of the People* (1882) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) were written after Ernst Haeckel coined the term "ecology" around 1866.[18] At the time, the rigors of "deep ecology" that have infused so much contemporary ecocritical discourse were decades away. Instead, ecology was still essentially a Linnaean "economy of nature," an accounting system that valued and preserved nature primarily for the resources it could offer humans. Ecology, in other words, was largely caught up in anthropocentric attitudes, much as were the genres of realism and naturalism that engaged Ibsen and vexed Chekhov.[19] But in *An Enemy of the People* and *The Cherry Orchard,* the ecosystem shows subtle and brief signs of emerging as a subject itself, albeit one still largely overshadowed by humans and an attendant anthropocentricity. By the time Müller penned *Despoiled Shore/ Medeamaterial/Landscape with Argonauts*, almost eighty years after the premiere of *The Cherry Orchard*, ecology had evolved. Müller's "synthetic fragment" deals with the same matters of pollution and deforestation that appear in Ibsen's and Chekhov's works, but his tale of humanity's complicity in global destruction is clearly influenced by the precepts of deep ecology. Together, these plays suggest that the history of ecological thought is legible within theater history, documented in its pages as clearly as any other

[18] Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 191.

[19] The word "was" in the above deserves clarification. As Daniel Botkin's espousal of resourcism indicates, anthropocentric attitudes often still inflect ecological ideologies. Worster, *Nature's Economy,* 415.

significant ideology of the past two hundred years.[20] But on the theater's stages, ecology has fared less successfully.

As Bausch's trees suggest, theater artists seem to have a difficult time depicting nature—not to mention the ecosystem—without substituting it for a humanmade object (a painting, for instance) or removing part of it, perhaps literally, from its native soil and placing it onstage, thereby dooming it to death. These strategies point to a theatrical mimesis run ecologically astray. It would be tempting simply to declare that depiction and, with it, mimesis are unavoidable elements of most forms of theater—particularly the matrixed work to which I have, largely, limited this study—and carry on as best possible were it not for the graphic, frankly anti-ecological consequences that even well-intentioned artists such as Bausch demonstrate are all too possible in performance. And so, the ecology genre must address the idea of staging by finding formal strategies through which theater may perform as part of the ecosystem.

In the cases of the three plays I examine in this chapter, *An Enemy of the People*, a product of Ibsen's realism, offers a conceptual gesture beyond the proscenium and into the natural world but no direct visual or physical depiction of the ecosystem itself. The absence of ecological depiction, in this context, actually brings *An Enemy of the People* into some degree of alignment with formal ecology theater: if a production does not replicate—or even attempt to replicate—the ecosystem onstage, then no synthetic displacement or replacement of the ecosystem occurs. Yet *An Enemy of the People's* resistance to depicting the ecosystem onstage has, I argue, less to do with practicing sound ecological principles in the theater than it does with the lingering primacy of

[20] Some ecological thought predates the nineteenth century, but I limit the scope of my inquiry here to include only pieces that were written after ecology was formalized as a field of inquiry—first as a science, then as an ethos.

humanity in the play. *The Cherry Orchard*, like *An Enemy of the People,* takes up ecological concerns, specifically deforestation, with an anthropocentrically jaundiced eye to preservation; but, formally, Chekhov's ecological gestures dissolve in the act of depiction, offering a useful demonstration of some of the particular challenges the stage holds for ecology theater. It is with Müller's *Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial/Landscape with Argonauts* that the most fruitful shift in ecology theater's approach to staging emerges. Müller suggests in an "Author's Note" that his work would be best realized as an environmental and, more particularly, a site-specific production. The strongest hope for theorizing and practicing an ecological mode of performance in the theater, I argue, may lie with site-specific, environmental staging.

"Standing on pestiferous soil": Contaminated Ecology in Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*[21]

Proclaimed by Lynn Jacobson to be the "granddaddy of environmental plays" at the forefront of a nascent theatrical eco-canon, Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* provides an early glimpse of the ecology genre in theater by grappling with the effects of industrial pollution on the ecosystem. [22] In a contemporary context, a play concerned with industrial pollution might seem unremarkable at best and clichéd at worst. In 1882, however, Ibsen's *Enemy* was ecologically groundbreaking for two reasons. First, it adopted an interest in the environment's wellbeing. Second, as Una Chaudhuri has

[21] Henrik Ibsen, "An Enemy of the People," *The Works of Henrik Ibsen*, R[obert] Farquharson Sharp trans. (Anaheim: Golgotha Press, 2010), 212. eBook.

[22] Lynn Jacobson, "Green theater: confessions of an eco-reporter," *Theatre* 8:11 (1992), 23; See also Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 24.

argued, "In the theater, naturalism (and then, more tendentiously, realism) hid its complicity with industrialization's animus against nature by proffering a wholly social account of human life."[23] That Ibsen, the "father of realism," departs provisionally from this rule—by revealing both human culpability for damage to the environment, in this case Norwegian waterways, and the source of the damage, a lucrative tannery—is ecologically and theatrically momentous.

Yet the play's potential contributions to a theatrical eco-canon are complicated by the plot's unsurprising focus on humans, while the ecosystem they pollute emerges as significant largely to highlight the unnamed town's social dilemmas. Ibsen explores only implicitly the negative effects of human pollution on the nonhuman, concentrating instead on the biological and, more notably, the economic effects environmental contamination has on human society. While troubling, in the context of the late nineteenth century, this anthropocentrism reflects the theory of economies of nature, a forerunner to ecology oriented more toward environmental resourcism than toward deep ecology.[24] Nevertheless, economies of nature, as illustrated in *An Enemy of the People,* demonstrate the period's developing understanding of the direct interconnection between humans and the environment, pointing to what was, at the time, emerging as the concept of ecosystems. Although it resists some of the core ideologies of contemporary ecology, *An Enemy of the People* is significant both as a historical example of an, albeit flawed, ecology play and as a vehicle both to define and refine the limits of ecology theater.

[23] Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be A Lot of Fish in that Lake,'" in *Theater*, 24.

[24] Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy,* 192.

An Enemy of the People immediately precedes *The Wild Duck* (1884) in Ibsen's *oeuvre*. Chaudhuri has brilliantly argued for the ecocritical relevance of *The Wild Duck*, which I place, thanks to her analysis, within the landscape genre, but of the two plays, *An Enemy of the People* is a far more direct participant in the condemnation of environmental pollution and its ramifications, enacting, at least partially and temporarily, the resistance to ecological metaphor that Chaudhuri designates as an essential condition of an eco-canon.[25] In part, *An Enemy of the People* does this by investigating an instance of very literal ecosystemic pollution. Yet this examination is undercut by the same sort of "hyperenvironmentalism" Raymond Williams criticizes as being essentially anti-ecological, and therefore anthropocentric, because it obsessively conflates the natural environment with human social concerns, establishing social anthropocentricity instead of aligning humanity and the ecosystem as equal and equally visible subjects through the balance of social ecology.[26] Given that theater has generally been created for humans by humans about humans, overcoming anthropocentric drama is a daunting task, one that *An Enemy of the People* often struggles to perform. Yet because pollution is both allegorical *and* literal in the piece, Ibsen's play moves toward engaging ecological issues as a worthy subject, laying out an early framework for the development of both ecology and ecocriticism over the century to follow, beginning with one their most essential, mutual concerns: the pollution of the ecosystem.

The pollution in *An Enemy of the People* stems from the tanneries at Mølledal, located upstream from the play's unnamed town, a result of the muck of greed and

[25] Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be A Lot of Fish in that Lake,'" in *Theater*, 28.

[26] Ibid., 26.

mediocrity that corrupts society—an idea that is both literal and figurative at points throughout the play. The town's literal reality is fairly straightforward: bacteria from the tanning process have corrupted the town's water supply and, most devastatingly, the water for the town's profitable therapeutic baths, which have become a popular tourist attraction, a veritable "gold-mine."[27] As the play opens, Dr. Stockmann, Ibsen's protagonist, is on the verge of releasing a devastating report regarding the dangers of this contamination. Specifically, Stockmann explains, the baths are teeming with "decayed organic matter" consisting of "millions of bacteria" that make the supposedly healthful water "injurious to health, for either internal or external use."[28] Stockmann elaborates, calling the baths "a whited sepulcher, the whole establishment—poisoned […]. A health hazard in the worst way" and explaining that "All that pollution up at Mølledal—all that reeking waste from the mill—it seeped into the pipes feeding the pump-room; and the same damn poisonous slop's been draining out on the beach as well."[29] An outline for cohesive social and environmental ecologies exists here: the social action of the townspeople could be used to clean and restore the ecosystem and, with it, the wellbeing of the town. When Peter Stockmann, the doctor's brother and the town's mayor, discovers the plan to reveal the danger of the baths, however, the literal contamination of the waters quickly reveals the figurative—and social—corruption of the town. At this point, the pollution from Mølledal becomes an overriding, anthropocentric theme that

[27]Ibsen, "An Enemy of the People," in *The Works of Henrik Ibsen*, 187.

[28] Henrik Ibsen, "An Enemy of the People," *Ibsen: Four Major Plays, Vol. II*, Rolf Fjelde, trans. (New York: Signet Classic, 2001), 103.

[29] Ibsen, "An Enemy of the People," in *Ibsen,* 103.

almost entirely tips the play into the ecologically "metaphorical" in contrast with Chaudhuri's stipulations for a literal ecology theater.

Accordingly, at this point, *An Enemy of the People* threatens to drift away from the ecological genre and into the anti-ecological "hyperenvironmentalism" Williams warns against.[30] Specifically, the ecosystem verges upon functioning as a mere pretext for what is primarily a discussion about society and the individual rather than as a broad, if not dominant, subject in terms of both the topic and agency with which a social ecology may align. After Stockmann reveals the baths' pollution and enjoys short-lived support for his cause from the more politically radical among the town's press, the matter of money takes the fore.[31] In short order, Ibsen draws an explicit parallel between the flow of corruption, in the forms of political influence and filthy lucre, through the town's nuanced social system (a distorted gesture toward social ecology) and the flow of pollution through the region's water system. It is Hovstad, a newspaperman, who first supports but then turns against Stockmann when his own financial well-being is threatened. Hovstad also initiates the comparison between pollution and corruption, obscuring the matter of environmental pollution and its source, the "poisoned swamp up at Mølledal," altogether only to replace them with a purely human-oriented impetus.[32] It is here that social ecology disappears completely in favor of an anthropocentric social system as the ecosystem becomes a metaphor for social structures. Hovstad explains,

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[30] Williams in Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be A Lot of Fish in that Lake,'" in *Theater*, 26.

[31] Ibsen, "An Enemy of the People," in *Ibsen,* 160.

[32] Ibid., 111.

instead, that the source of the trouble is "the swamp where our whole community lies": political corruption.[33]

These erasures and, later, substitutions of the ecosystemic subject, however, do not entirely obscure the potential for any ecological relevance in the play. Economies of nature still offer a helpful model for understanding the flow of influence and, in imperfect union, pollution throughout *An Enemy of the People*—though the economies of nature are, at this point, of greater service to reading the play than the play is to informing rigorous ecological insight. "One thing leads to another," Dr. Stockmann declares, speaking of the "water systems and sewers" as points of inspiration for a series of ruminations, related not just to physical but also to social pollution, he undertakes to publish.[34] Within the structure of economies of nature, the non-human (nature) is still decidedly separate from humanity and is treated as a storehouse of potentially utilitarian and, therefore, monetary value—both of which provide, along with aesthetic pleasure, the only value nature has according to an anthropocentric ethos. While the tributaries that feed the baths literally contaminate the town, it is the flow of money, running along paths similar to those of the town's streams, that establishes the most basic way of defining the value of the baths.

Early on, Mayor Stockmann notes that "land and property values are rising every day" as they have for the two years during which the baths have been operational, reviving the town's once-failing economy. Once the town's money, its true source of vitality, is threatened, any other measure of health, whether biological or ecological, is

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 133.

cast aside in favor of preserving, at any cost, the town's financial well-being. Dr. Stockmann's work is suppressed, and he is condemned as an "enemy of the people."[35] His environmental discovery and ultimate vilification are significant on their own, but arguably gain more momentum in tandem with his sociopolitical declarations. "[D]egeneracy and corruption of all kinds," he claims, "are a sort of by-product of culture, filtering down to us like all the pollution filtering down to the baths from the tanneries up at Mølledal."[36] Dr. Stockmann, then, draws the most direct comparison between the ecological and the social. For a man who is naively oblivious to the financial and political ramifications of his discovery—he believes he will be praised by the townspeople, including his competitive brother, and perhaps even offered a raise, which he plans graciously to refuse, rather than be plunged into poverty and ruin—this sudden awakening is notable, even jarring. It is also a trenchant and prescient criticism of any attempt to pull humanity—politics and all—from the matrix of the ecosystem.

Stockmann's realization about the interconnectedness of humanity, through its social practices and the environment, could have led the play in a far different direction than it finally runs. But instead of attempting to reverse the town's literal and figurative pollution, Ibsen pushes his protagonist to turn against the entire community as it turns against him, promising to "stamp […] out" every last citizen if necessary.[37] Stockmann's eventual ostracism is, then, the inevitable result of opposing a social system or—though on altogether different terms—an ecosystem, unless the resistance one mounts against

[35] Ibid., 175.

[36] Ibid., 170.

[37] Ibid., 157.

either system has sufficient support.[38] Once the rest of his potential supporters realize that backing Stockmann would be financially disastrous (although the failure to correct the pollution will also likely prove to be financially disastrous as well), Ibsen, through the doctor, effectively dismantles any ecologically sound argument the play might make. Rather than moving away from the notion of a social hierarchy, the very sort of hierarchy that was politically responsible for his own downfall and against which he rails for the better part of the play, Stockmann simply calls for a new hierarchy, placing himself at the top, in poor imitation of Darwin's survival of the fittest, "the law of nature."[39]

With this parody of ecological structures, *An Enemy of the People* finally fails ecologically, but it is an informative failure. On the one hand, Stockmann—who, for reasons I will discuss in a moment, is meant to be the moral paragon of the play—resists one hierarchy only to advocate another. On the other, ecology declares that those who oppose "the system," and particularly those who are ostracized, often die or—and this is one of the play's great ironies, given its literal and thematic pollution and the human source of that pollution—kill others in the process. The ramifications of the former offer a poor model for identifying Stockmann as "the fittest" in a battle for survival, and the consequences of the latter are poor analogies for ecology. In retrospect, Ibsen builds to this conclusion from the beginning, establishing the baths as a metaphor for an

[38] This is admittedly a slippery point of comparison. To clarify, I am arguing that Stockmann's resistance to the social system is allegorically comparable to resisting an ecological system. Although this comparison still uses ecosystems to characterize human behavior, the fact that Ibsen establishes any kind of overlap between nature and humanity is itself significant. The fact too that the comparison is available to begin with because human social systems are being blamed for causing ecosystemic problems and are thereby entwined with the ecosystem is, at this point in the development of early ecological ideologies, significant. Note too that the outcomes will differ for each act of resistance to or compliance with the respective systems named. To support the social system in this case is to move against the ecosystem (though the social system will ultimately face the repercussions of this decision as well). To support the ecosystem is to fly in the face of the social system.

[39] Ibsen, "An Enemy of the People," in *Ibsen,* 193.

ecosystem, the "great common concern that binds us all together," but assigning these lines to Mayor Stockmann, one of the play's "true" villains.[40] The Mayor follows this declaration moments later with advice for his brother that is, in the context of the play, horrifically oppressive yet, outside of the play, ecologically sound, saying, "one individual has to learn to subordinate himself to the whole."[41] Dr. Stockmann fails to heed this advice. And though we do not see the outcome on the other side of his ostracism, he remains, to the end of the play, spiritually intact and even elevated by his social rejection. In a totalizing turn to the anthropocentric, Stockmann becomes, at least in his own estimation, a kind of superman among a society for the "common man," which he believes is comprised of little more than "animals."[42] Added to this, Ibsen's protagonist rejects the notion of community, an attempted stand-in for the ecosystem, in favor of generating an insular world by placing himself at the top of an ideologically anti-communal hierarchy.

The conflicting signals that pervade the ending of *An Enemy of the People*, however, likely have far less to do with any intentionally haphazard application of Darwinian principles or economies of nature—or any particular investment in the ecosystem—than they do with Ibsen's particularly unruly hobbyhorse. In part, *An Enemy of the People*'s success as an ecology play drifts due to a lingering, metaphorical undercurrent. The play not only retains the anthropocentrism of economies of nature, it

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[40] Ibid., 89.

[41] Ibid., 95.

[42] Ibid., 163; Animals emerge earlier in the play as a source of insidious trouble when Kiil, Dr. Stockmann's father-in-law by adoption and the owner of one of the suspect tanneries calls the bacteria invading the baths "animals" that "got loose in the water pipes" (109). Further, Robert Brustein notes that George Bernard Shaw "applauds the rebellious Doctor Stockmann for exposing the diseased roots of modern life." See Robert Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), 45.

was written as a thinly veiled screed against the chilly reception of his previously play *Ghosts*. Robert Brustein argues that Ibsen penned *An Enemy of the People* as a scathing condemnation of theater audiences and critics, "propelled by his fury over the hostile reception" that greeted his earlier play."[43] As a result, *An Enemy of the People* "is a straightforwardly polemical," if ideologically crowded, "work […] echoing Ibsen's private convictions about the filth and disease of modern municipal life, the tyranny of the compact majority, the mediocrity of parliamentary democracy, the cupidity of the Conservatives, and the hypocrisy of the Liberal press."[44] This rejection of critical and popular mediocrity (Stockmann goes so far as to call the masses "stupid") leads Dr. Stockmann, possibly Ibsen's surrogate, to reject society or any other kind of interdependent system of living in an attempt to stand on his own, hailing himself as the strongest man not just in the town—even as he is condemned by the other citizens—but in the world.[45] That he plans to replicate his ideology of independence by planning his own school, again invoking a poorly rendered version of Darwin's survival of the fittest as a model, simply exacerbates the play's broader obfuscation of ecological ideals.

Nevertheless, despite—and, in part, through—the play's conclusion, *An Enemy of the People* offers an important glimpse into the historic origins of ecology as a topic in theater. As complex and, in many ways, as problematic as any contemporary exploration of ecology and ecocriticism, Ibsen's play offers neither a simple polemic against pollution nor total erasure of the natural beyond the realm of the human. Merely by invoking the matter of human-generated pollution and, moreover, by tracing the effects of

[43] Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt*, 71.

[44] Ibid., 71, 72.

[45] Ibsen, "An Enemy of the People," in *Ibsen,* 165.

that pollution even so far as human society, Ibsen pulls away the curtain of realism to reveal a larger world, albeit one that acts as a conduit for the self-destruction of humanity. Yet the baths themselves are, if fleetingly, an attempt to point beyond the stage that encompasses *An Enemy of the People*. The healthful properties of the baths are in a sense alien, other, almost miraculous as they pump life back into sick humans and vital financial resources into the ailing town. That the perils of industry will eventually destroy both the baths and, likely, the town blunts the full impact of a potential ecological message but offers evidence, nonetheless, that the ideals of the age of ecology were already seeping into public awareness.

Finally, in parallel to the complex topical contribution *An Enemy of the People* makes to an ecology theater, the play offers a potential, albeit somewhat counterintuitive, solution to the clash between the synthetic, insular modes of depiction demanded by the stage and their tension with ecology theater's insistence upon engagement with the ecosystem. Formally, *An Enemy of the People* avoids physical depiction of the ecosystem altogether. Downing Cless reads the absence of visual depiction of the ecosystem in the play as "scenic reinforcement for the toxic invisibility" of the baths' pollution, an apt assessment of the situation; but the absence of the ecosystem also negates the stage's aestheticizing power by refusing even a glimpsed reproduction of the baths or, indeed, any part of the exterior ecosystem whatsoever.[46] At first glance, this is an ingenious approach to the problem of ecology performance on the conventional stage, but, upon closer examination, the absence of the ecosystem further reveals the play's own obsession with humanity, focusing on the interior spaces of human habitation—the

[46] Cless, *Ecology and Environment in European Drama,* 158.

parlors, offices and town halls that are *oikoi* of a fashion—but not the *oikos* of the ecosphere. Cless again notes that this interiority allows "the townspeople and the audience" to "shut out awareness of the sources of the problem" of pollution, "thereby losing track of the environmental stakes" of the play's unifying topic, the ecosystem, which has barely and briefly—if at all—risen to the level of subject.[47]

As flawed as the approach may be, in a play troubled by a problematic if informative ecology, the absence of any depiction of the ecosystem from *An Enemy of the People*'s stage still offers a more ecologically sound solution to the matter of aesthetic reproduction than does Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard.* Like Ibsen, Chekhov takes up the matter of environmental conservation problematized, as in *An Enemy of the People*, by overriding concerns with the relevance of the eponymous cherry orchard to humans. But Chekhov moves deeper into ecological territory than Ibsen in both topical and, problematically, formal contexts. For good and ill, *The Cherry Orchard* returns to the connection between ecology and the social while dramatizing some of the particular problems of performing ecology theater on the stage.

"All Russia is our orchard": The Ecosystem and the Stage in Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*[48]

Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, like Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, engages, albeit late and with difficulty, the values of economies of nature. Although its worth is predicated upon economic value and utility, and in resistance to its function as a

[47] Cless, *Ecology and Environment in European Drama,* 158.

[48] Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard (Stage Edition Series),* Laurence Senelick, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 70.

metaphor for the old ways of aristocratic life in Russia, the cherry orchard becomes at least partially legible as an entity unto itself over the course of the play. *The Cherry Orchard* begins before the death-knell of the Russian aristocracy as the members of a landed family return to their ancestral estate, which is in dire financial straits. Together, the family members—Madame Ranevskaya, the matriarch, her children and her brother Gaev—and various servants, acquaintances and hangers-on engross themselves in nostalgia for the past, extol the glory of nature and scheme to maintain—or in the case of Lopakhin, seize—ownership of the estate along with its sprawling cherry orchard. Fraught with dubious origins and, often, anthropocentric associations, the doomed cherry orchard nonetheless attains a minor degree of subjectivity not despite but through its connection with the social priorities of the play's characters as they approach—but only approach—a social ecology. Formally, however, the play is a cautionary example for ecology theater, demonstrating precisely why the attempt to replicate the ecosystem—or at best, a portion of the ecosystem—on the conventional stage exists in tension with the principles of ecology theater.

Admittedly, *The Cherry Orchard*, with its emphasis on the utility and beauty of nature, and retention of the divisive notion of nature, might fit comfortably within the landscape genre. I have, nevertheless, chosen to examine it as an ecology play for two reasons. First, the plot of *The Cherry Orchard* centers on the destruction of a part of the ecosystem, a matter that seldom if ever arises as a concern in landscape theater (which arguably has no ecosystem to concern itself with, given that its world is the stage, synthetic and insular).[49] Second, when read in the context of economies of nature, the

[49] Once more, I invoke the caveat that I am referring to the absence of visible traces of the living ecosystem—again, humans notwithstanding—on the stage.

same hint at an ecologically informed ideology visible in *An Enemy of the People* becomes accessible in *The Cherry Orchard*. In other words, the fact that the cherry orchard is considered as an entity unto itself at all, if briefly, and in connection with the broader well-being of the ecosystem, is a significant step toward formulating a meaningful ecological ethos, particularly only twenty years after Ibsen's foray into ecology. Joseph Meeker goes even further, noting that in *The Cherry Orchard*, "[Human beings] are not superior to nature" and even "seem to be inferior to the symbols of nature with which they are juxtaposed."[50] But nature remains, at least in part, a symbolic entity and, therefore, subordinate to humans. Particularly given the historical context of the piece, however, any movement toward understanding nature as a subjective entity was a step toward building the values of ecology.

It is important to remember that an ecology play need not feature "responsible" ecological practices, at least topically. In other words, its characters themselves need not model sound ecological behavior or attitudes. Central instead to the designation of a piece of theater as an ecology play is its demonstration of an acknowledged connection between the ecosystem and its inhabitants. This connection may be positive and even mutually supportive or it may be damaging. So long as the connection is revealed and the distance between humanity and the ecosystem (along with the dichotomy of nature) diminished, the play is potentially ecological. The piece can, accordingly, criticize phenomena like pollution or demonstrate the pitfalls of adhering to the nature-culture divide, but, in contrast with the landscape genre, ecology theater performs this critique by rejecting rather than simply revealing the false dichotomy of nature. What *The Cherry*

[50] Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*, 60. Meeker also applies this observation to works by Ibsen and O'Neill.

Orchard criticizes, at least implicitly, is the cavalier treatment of both people and trees in service of maintaining the dwindling lifestyle of the Russian aristocracy—here, the Gaev-Ranevskaya family—and the emergence of the capitalist—here, Lopakhin—who continues to treat the land as a resource and, in Lopahkin's case, a prize demonstrating his rise from peasant to bourgeois businessman. Either way, the orchard will be maintained or sacrificed primarily for the good of a few humans, an attitude the play seems to condemn, especially during its dark and droll conclusion when both the estate's orchard and one of its servants are abandoned. Yet at the edges of this anthropocentric structure, and despite the overwrought nostalgia many of the characters express for the cherry orchard as a feature of the happier (for many of them) days of the Russian aristocracy, a sense that the trees are valued as living entities creeps in.

The matter of formal ecology in *The Cherry Orchard* is just as complex as that of its topical ecology. *The Cherry Orchard*'s mise-en-scène, when performed onstage, may be in the service of an insistent metatheatricality, demonstrated through one of the play's most distinctive features, the "breaking string." In one sense, the string is potentially useful to a formal ecology theater because it demonstrates that *The Cherry Orchard* is not a naturalist play. The string, in other words, eliminates any doubt that the play is aware of its status as a play in contrast with a naturalist production, which would attempt to conceal any indication of its own theatricality. But the string also pushes the mise-en-scène in the direction of metatheatrical landscape theater. This formal ambivalence suggests that although *The Cherry Orchard* deals with an ecological topic—with all of the attendant problems that categorization brings—its form hovers at the border of landscape theater and would slip entirely into the realm of landscape were it not for the

relative absence of other crucial landscape features. Particularly, and in direct contrast with Chekhov's *The Seagull*, most of *The Cherry Orchard*'s characters (the butler Firs, who is left behind and alone in the mansion at the end of the play, is a notable exception) are less bound by the frame than they would be in a landscape play. Instead, the former denizens of the estate and its accompanying cherry orchard eagerly anticipate the new life that awaits them beyond the bounds of the world visible onstage. The primary issue these matters of depiction illuminate, though, is that plays which attempt to present the ecosystem onstage do not fare well within the strictures of formal ecology. The representation of the ecosystem onstage, regardless of the depth of the ecological subjects being staged, still offers a synthetic image, an illusion suggesting that the theater can offer its audiences a replica of the ecosystem, to be arranged and rearranged at will, that is just as palpable as the ecosystem outside the stage door.

The Cherry Orchard begins—and ends—on a decidedly anthropocentric note. Its environmental disaster, as the clearing of the orchard is widely regarded, is humanmade, but not through pollution and not in tension with the economic interests of the majority of the characters. Instead, Chekhov addresses the power of life and death humankind holds over the flora it controls; at the same time, he explores a series of social revolutions—some extant, some imminent—that value, or not, the ecosystem to varying degrees. Throughout the play, the orchard is assigned meaning relative primarily to human interests, and serves as a space of nostalgia, beauty, and economic value. Once the last of these has been exhausted and the land is deemed more valuable without the trees, the ax swings. The destruction of the cherry orchard is a powerful example of the ecosystem's treatment as nature and, moreover, as a cache of potential resources. When those

resources are desirable—meaning they can be easily converted into financial resources—nature is allowed to remain visible within the human sphere. When nature outlives its usefulness, however, it must be altered or eliminated.

Early on, the economic value of the orchard becomes one of the dominant subjects of the play. Once, the orchard was an agricultural and, in turn, economic resource for the family. Its fruit was harvested annually and sold in the form of dried cherries or other products. The servant Firs, himself a relic of the estate, explains that "In the old days, forty-fifty years back, cherries were dried, preserved, pickled, made into jam […]. Then there was money!"[51] A few lines later, when asked what happened to the recipe that drove the orchard's success, Fir says, "It's forgot. Nobody remembers it."[52] The connection forged here between the loss of memory and loss of money conveniently omits the significance of the orchard itself, which remains viable even as it becomes vulnerable. Robert Brustein contextualizes the loss of the recipe, and therefore the financial engine for the family, in terms of culture. He explains: "The recipe is 'forgotten'—forgotten like the culture of the Prozorovs [of *Three Sisters*]—forgotten like the purpose and passion of the decaying Russian gentry. Once valuable both for beauty and utility, the justification for the existence of the orchard has now passed out of memory, and it must go the way of all things useless."[53] This observation establishes an important nexus incorporating the complexity of social, economic and ecosystemic structures, but the lingering emphasis upon the former two reveals a significant and

[51] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 56.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt*, 168.

pervasive omission during this early period of ecological awareness, with little trace of the social ecology that could bring human and ecosystemic wellbeing into visible accord.[54] The cherry orchard is, effectively, a nonentity as long as it remains outside of a viable context for human use. Rather, it is human ingenuity in the form of the recipe that is portrayed as the greater loss. The value of the land alone, which Lopakhin plans to subdivide and sell to summer tenants, instead becomes the more valuable resource. The trees are simply in the way, their produce no longer saleable— although their wood will, perhaps, be useful to build more of the telegraph poles that mar the panorama of the Russian countryside.[55]

This emphasis on economic viability correlates to a degree with economies of nature but far more with general financial economies. To cut down the cherry orchard represents a waste of viable "natural" material according to the economies of nature. Though the orchard would still be regarded in a utilitarian context, an economy of nature would offer a way to begin to value the cherry orchard, still for its use to humans but not solely as a resource to be embraced or destroyed per se. An economy of nature, in other words, would privilege the preservation of the cherry orchard as a potential resource regardless of its imminent usefulness. Eventually, Chekhov offers a glimpse of this refined perspective through Trofimov, a student and (imminently Bolshevik) leftist mouthpiece, who soliloquizes, "Mankind is advancing, perfecting its powers. […] Lord, you gave us vast forests, boundless fields, the widest horizons, and living here, we really

[54] In an insightful ecological reading of *The Cherry Orchard,* Downing Cless offers a parallel trio of classifications: "The title of Chekhov's last play establishes the natural stake, and trees are vehicles for a conflict between three ways of treating environment: pastoral idealization, commercial development, and ecological action." See Cless, *Ecology and Environment in European Drama*, 148-49.

[55] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 55.

and truly ought to be giants."[56] The lingering anthropocentric idealism winding through Trofimov's speech at once celebrates and devalues the resources that he claims should elevate humanity, mirroring the complex dynamic of the orchard in the context of economies of nature. On the one hand, humans are reliant upon the ecosystem for their own advancement, for their own lives. On the other, the ecosystem emerges as *oikos* here only in the sense of household accounting, a system in service of humanity. The metaphor of the giant illustrates precisely the idea that no matter the scope of the ecosphere or its constituent elements, mankind should always be superior to, even while reliant upon, those very elements.

Trofimov eventually brings his declaration around to another ideology that appears, if momentarily, to point to a broader ecological context for the orchard. When Anya, one of Ranevskaya's daughters and Trofimov's love interest, asks, "What have you done to me, Petya [Trofimov], why have I stopped loving the cherry orchard as I used to? I loved it so tenderly, there seemed to me no finer place on earth than our orchard," she conveys a formerly deep, albeit lost, connection to the orchard for its own sake. She too is at a loss for the underlying causes of displacement, perhaps resisting the notion that she may have predicated her love on a value system that mimics too closely the economies competing to control the orchard.[57] Trofimov responds by moving the cultural narrative he began moments earlier forward from one of class to one of nationalism, from estate to nation, declaring that now, "All Russia is our orchard. The

[56] Ibid., 69, 70.

[57] Ibid., 72.

world is wide and beautiful and there are many wonderful places in it."[58] In one gesture, Trofimov articulates the paradox of ecology in the play and, moreover, in economies of nature: ecosystems such as the cherry orchard must be valued for the resources they provide and simply for themselves. But in the context of the broader ecosphere with the potential to produce countless similar orchards (or so it would seem, given Trofimov's sense of the boundlessness of the Russian state, geographically and otherwise), how valuable can one poorly cultivated group of trees be?[59]

Anya's declaration later in the play, meant to assuage her mother's grief at leaving the orchard—which acts as a synecdochic substitute for the entire estate, Ranevskaya's past and the old way of life—may as well be a delayed response to Trofimov's vision. She announces, "We'll plant a new orchard, more splendid than this one."[60] The glimpse of a newer, brighter future constructed in the likeness of the past and the notion that another orchard should exist at all offer bright spots in her vision of the days ahead; but the idea that flora are interchangeable or replaceable also suggests that they are expendable.

The portion of *The Cherry Orchard* that marks its ecological advancement, relative to *An Enemy of the People*, however, is the outpouring of sorrow the family, in the main, demonstrates about the demise of the orchard. It is easy, of course, to ascribe

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Cless observers, regarding this moment, that "Here, despite Trofimov's absurdity through the rest of the play, Chekhov merges natural and social ecology, also past and future, in a unified vision, even if fleeting." See Cless, *Ecology and Environment in European Drama*, 151. I respond, however, that while both social and ecological forces emerge within Trofimov's speech, the overriding anthropocentricity of his perspective prevents those forces from emerging (or merging, as they case may be) as a social ecology in the context in which Commoner, Naess, Bateson and Guattari define the concept.

[60] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 84.

this sense of loss to the symbolic properties of the orchard—and to the relentless sense of nostalgia mixed with sorrow that the family directs toward every element of the estate and, by extension, to the memory of the aristocracy in its prime.[61] Yet, from the first moments of the play, the orchard slips almost relentlessly into Chekhov's descriptions of the estate, including its interior.[62] As the first day of *The Cherry Orchard* dawns, Varya, Ranevskaya's adopted daughter, declares, "[W]hat wonderful trees! My goodness, the air!"[63] Quickly, this immediate experience of the orchard and the countryside gives way to memory, with Ranevskaya reminiscing, "O, my childhood, my innocence! I slept in this nursery, gazed out at the orchard, happiness awoke with me every morning, and it was just the same then, nothing has changed," before the vibrancy of the orchard itself pulls her again to the present moment, "All, all white! O, my orchard! After the dark, drizzly autumn and the cold winter, you're young again, full of happiness, the angels in heaven haven't forsaken you… ."[64] Brustein reads moments such as this as indications of the metaphorical use of the orchard throughout the play, saying, "The cherry orchard, therefore, is the vestigial symbol of a once vigorous way of life—an aesthetic pleasure in a crude environment—but it also represents the deterioration which has now overtaken that life."[65] While accurate, the orchard also arguably slips away from this position over the course of the play, albeit with such subtlety that its eventual emergence as an ecological presence might almost be lost.

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[61] My thanks to W.B. Worthen for sharing this observation.

[62] Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss,* 61. I address this moment more fully below.

[63] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 58.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt*, 174.

This process begins in an unlikely moment. When Gaev waxes histrionic on the eve of the orchard's destruction, "Oh Nature, wondrous creature, aglow with eternal radiance, beautiful yet impassive, you whom we call Mother, merging with yourself Life and Death, you nourish and you destroy… ," the agent of nourishment and destruction he references may as well be mankind.[66] Nevertheless, the fact that nature finds its way into this system of existence at all—and as a potential, if unrealized, equal to humankind no less—is a significant step toward the more radical ecologies waiting over the horizon of the early twentieth century. The traditional, anthropomorphic classification of nature as an "impassive" mother figure nevertheless gives way to the contradictory acknowledgment of nature's encompassing power. The notions of merger, of nourishment and destruction functioning within a systemic whole that includes humanity point to an emerging ecosystemic understanding of the world, even though this awareness remains couched in problematic language. This tiny, hard-fought victory for ecosystemic unity lasts for the most fleeting of moments in the play, but its presence among characters otherwise given to relentlessly anthropocentric ideals is just enough to make *The Cherry Orchard* an ecologically instructive piece of theater.

Beyond its specific subject matter of environmental preservation and despite the moderate ecological progress I argue the play makes (never fully emerging from—and at times failing even to reach—the shadow of nature's economies) *The Cherry Orchard* offers a largely problematic approach to formal ecology. When performed on the stage, *The Cherry Orchard's* representation of the outdoors, its depiction of the trees and fields that surround the estate can by only synthetic. Through this simulacrum, the theater

[66] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 70.

reproduces and effectively replaces the ecosystem with a clever, artificial double. If actual trees are culled from the outdoors, the theater becomes a place of destructive synecdoche as was the unfortunate arboreal carnage on Bausch's stage. Yet some of the formal elements of *The Cherry Orchard* offer instructive points of inquiry in the effort to construct a formal ecology theater despite the broader —and predominant—problem that staged depiction of the ecosystem poses. This process is most evident in juxtaposition with the landscape genre.

Whereas in landscape theater characters are static, hemmed in by the frame of the stage as are figures in a painted landscape—or as in *The Seagull*, by the proscenium frame itself—here, Chekhov directs his characters toward the promise of a future that offers mobility and newfound freedom. Excited about departing permanently from the estate, Anya joyfully declares they are about to enter "a new life."[67] The characters' ability to depart—from the estate and from the stage, in counterpoint to the figures of landscape theater—coupled with their concern, albeit brief, for the orchard reorients the play outward from the stage and away from the trajectory of landscape theater.

Not only do the framed boundaries prominent in the landscape genre begin to weaken in *The Cherry Orchard,* the very boundaries that divide interior from exterior start to fade as well. Arnold Aronson observes, "Chekhov's stage directions are always telling us about the outside, even when we are inside."[68] Citing the opening stage

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[67] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 88. Gaev elaborates: "As a matter of fact, everything's fine now. Before the sale of the cherry orchard, we were all upset, distressed, but then, once the matter was settled finally, irrevocably, everyone calmed down, even cheered up... ." (88). Notably, the cherry orchard won't be living a new life. The characters' sudden, blithe dismissal of the loss of the orchard and their formerly heart-wrenching woes points also to the family's rampant frivolity—an appropriate mode for the characters, perhaps, considering that Chekhov intended for the play to be a comedy.

[68] Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss,* 61. Cless notes, in tension with the predominant impulses of many if not most directors and, arguably, Chekhov's stage directions themselves, that "It is clear that Chekhov

directions of the play, in which Chekhov seamlessly transitions from a description of the interior nursery to the vast, outdoor orchard, Aronson further notes that "Chekhov has dissolved the separation of inside and outside," a phenomenon that a number of contemporary directors, including Peter Brook and Andrei Serban, have utilized through sets that also break down the divisions between indoor and outdoor spaces and even between the stage and auditorium—a form of environmental staging.[69] As the internal focus of the stage loosens, so may the landscape convention that asks audiences to think of, say, trees and orchards as objects that are framed, aestheticized and, therefore, divided off from their own realms of experience, even in the theater. In short, without so many clearly landscape-oriented structures, physical or otherwise, to frame *The Cherry Orchard*, it becomes easier to see the play, both topically and formally, as more directly connected to the world it references, the world beyond the stage door, than it is to a framed canvas. Yet, the threat of repeating the errors of naturalism—mistaking the hyper-synthetic recreation of natural space for a section of the ecosystem itself, all while concealing this perceptual error—looms large.

Chekhov makes one move toward confronting this naturalistic problem through the play's infamous breaking string, a stage effect that is both symbolic and mimetic. During the second act, the majority of the play's characters find themselves at the edge of the vast cherry orchard. As they lounge, waxing both philosophical and nostalgic in turn, "*Suddenly a distant sound is heard, as if from the sky, the sound of a breaking string,*

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wants the presence of the orchard to be subtle and distant." See Cless, *Ecology and Environment in European Drama*, 151

[69] Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss,* 61, 142; Laurence Senelick, "Director's Chekhov," *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, Vera Gottlieb and Paul Allain, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 188, 189.

dying away, mournfully."[70] Immediately, the characters react with confusion, wondering where the odd sound has come from and what it could possibly be. Much of the critical response to this moment over the past century has been to classify the breaking string as surrealistic, as Bert States argues, metatheatrical and, perhaps most aptly, symbolist. [71] According to the last school of thought, the moment lies outside of the bounds of naturalism to sound a metaphysical break with the past or perhaps a fundamental disruption in the natural order of things. Lopakhin's comment immediately following the sound offers an alternative: "Somewhere far off in a mineshaft the rope broke on a bucket. But somewhere very far off."[72] Edward Braun argues that this is, in fact, the correct interpretation of the effect, situating the moment squarely within the realm of mimesis. [73] Braun concludes that, "there is nothing 'symbolic' about the cherry orchard (or the breaking string, for that matter) in the sense of the universal, the transcendental or the ineffable."[74]

It is difficult, nevertheless, to deny what seems to be the intentional symbolic quality of this moment. First, the break follows almost immediately upon Gaev's speech praising "Nature […] whom we call Mother, […]," as she "nourish[es] and […]

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[70] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 70.

[71] Bert O. States. *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 82.

[72] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 70.

[73] Edward Braun, "From *Platanov* to *Piano*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, 114. Laurence Senelick also notes that the breaking string is a noise Chekhov references elsewhere, explaining, "This was a sound Chekhov remembered hearing as a boy. In his story 'Happiness,' he uses it ironically as a spectral laugh, presaging disappointment." Senelick, "Director's Chekhov," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, 148.

[74] Braun, "From *Platanov* to *Piano*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, 115.

destroy[s].”[75] The ideal timing of the string’s twang seems to punctuate Gaev’s observation, particularly with regard to destruction, as the family looks upon the cherry orchard, whose death will also mark the end of the their former way of life. Second, Chekhov’s symbolist leanings seem almost to demand the employment of an effect like the sound of the strings in complement to both the dreamlike flow of space throughout *The Cherry Orchard*’s mise-en-scène and Chekhov’s devotion to aesthetic consistency.[76]

Nevertheless, this effect contributes more to the ecological topic of the play than it does to the creation of a formal theater ecology. The breaking string can be understood as both a naturalist (it is a rope in a mine) *and* symbolist (it is cosmic commentary) trope, heralding, either way, the fracture of the familiar world. In both contexts, the effect signals a threat to the cherry orchard through industrial advancement and the death of the aristocracy. In the last moments of the play, the juxtaposition of the second occurrence of this mysterious sound with the second and final thud of an ax against a tree trunk reinforces the notion that the threat of modernization, of the manipulation and even erasure of nature, is no longer far away. It is now both here, with the trees, and out there in the world—everywhere. In fact, it is also “visible” in the “telegraph poles” Chekhov describes as standing above the cherry orchard.[77] While this gesture allows the play to acknowledge the ecosystem and its gradual destruction beyond the walls of the theater, it does not resolve the eco-mimetic problems of the stage, which can never, formally, be a place of anything other than depiction for the ecosystem. But like the promise of the first

[75] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 70.

[76] Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss*, 122.

[77] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 63.

appearance of ecological topics onstage—whether related to pollution or preservation—this gesture does indicate the first steps toward better understanding some of the crucial features of a formal ecological theater beyond the stage.

The Cherry Orchard exemplifies a diminishing impulse to hide or carefully sculpt the environment as landscape or to meet realist or naturalist ends, even as there were such gestures in *An Enemy of the People*. Moreover, despite its apparent function as a symbol for the old way of life, at least to a degree, the cherry orchard is also legible as an entity unto itself. Nature, in *The Cherry Orchard*, is valued, if for utilitarian and aesthetic purposes, as part of a way of life; but the play also makes clear that this attitude only constitutes the beginning of a necessary shift in attitude, albeit one that may never come to fruition, even as the horizon is dotted with "telegraph poles" and the specter of a "large town."[78] Fraught with dubious origins and, often, anthropocentric associations, the cherry orchard nonetheless attains a weak degree of ontological autonomy not despite but through its association with the social priorities of the play and, more specifically, the characters' acknowledgment that the orchard is comprised of living entities—at least and most damningly until they abandon the orchard for lost and, with it, their ever-faithful servant Firs, who is locked in the estate and apparently forgotten. The fact that the rest of the piece, excepting the characters' appreciation of the terrain, does not adhere to the characteristics of the landscape genre—the characters are not trapped within the proscenium frame, spatial organization is fluid, the scene is not static—all point to potential contributions *The Cherry Orchard* can make to the ecology genre, even if these features still fail to establish a formal theater ecology.

[78] Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, 63.

In the end, *The Cherry Orchard* offers a clear demonstration of why stage productions are problematic to ecology theater. No matter how literal, how concrete the mimesis, no theater production that unfolds onstage will ever do more than refer to the world beyond. Even were a performance to replicate an ecosystem onstage—as modeled in *The Wild Duck*—that ecosystem would simply be a reference to or a simulacrum for the ecosphere.[79] *The Cherry Orchard*'s acknowledgment of the limitations of the stage is productive for the genre of ecology theater, most particularly by clarifying the formal problems that the stage poses. Heiner Müller's *Despoiled Shore/ Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts* carries this exploration even further, redefining the idea of naturalism in theater by carrying its performance into the world.

"turn MY body into the landscape/ Of MY death": Toward a Formal Ecology Theater in Heiner Müller's *Despoiled Shore/ Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts*[80]

In the "Author's Note" preceding *Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts* (1983), a gritty meditation on social and ecological decay played out through a palimpsest of modern Germany and ancient Greek mythology, Heiner Müller insists, "This text needs the naturalism of the stage."[81] He proposes that "DESPOILED SHORE can be performed in a peep show" and "MEDEAMATERIAL at a lake near Straussberg that is a muddy swimming pool in Beverly Hills or the baths of a psychiatric

[79] Chaudhuri, "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater* 30.

[80] Heiner Müller. *Hamletmachine and Other Texts For the Stage*, Carl Weber, trans. and ed. (New York: PAJ Publications, 1984), 135.

[81] Ibid., 126.

hospital" before continuing, "Just as MAUSER presumed a society of transgression in which a man condemned to death can turn his real death on stage into a collective experience, LANDSCAPE WITH ARGONAUTS presumes the catastrophes which mankind is working toward.[82] The theatre's contribution to their prevention can only be their representation."[83]

Müller's introduction raises a freight of provocative questions, ranging from the interrogation of aesthetic form to the ideologies of social ecology and, given the current of ecosystemic disaster that flows through this trio of texts, environmental ecology. Specifically, in what sense does his evocation of "the naturalism of the stage," through a lake playing a muddy pool or perhaps a bath at an asylum, accord with theatrical naturalism as a genre? Might Müller be concerned with the verisimilitude of visceral experience separate from the naturalism of Zola, Darwin and Stanislavski? And what does his assertion that "the theater's contribution to [the] prevention" of imminent human catastrophes "can only be their representation" mean for theater's relevance as a force for political, social and, with these, ecological change?

The three parts of *Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts* move through three major points of ecocriticism and, consequently, embody the primary concerns of the ecology genre in theater. The piece is a loose re-telling of the Medea myth, run through the blender of postmodernity that characterizes most of Müller's work. *Despoiled Shore* offers a tour of the ruined, polluted world that serves as the play's terrain; *Medeamaterial*, the literal and figurative center of the play and the most direct

[82] *Mauser* is Müller's embattled 1970 play positioned as a response to Brecht's *The Measures Taken.*

[83] Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 126 [capitalized in the original].

echo of Euripides' text, is primarily a monologue delivered by Medea as she excoriates Jason. The extended passage deals with Medea's rage at Jason's betrayal and the horror of murder—past and impending. In the process, Müller posits an implicit argument about the relationship of humans to animals that moves into the territory of deep ecology. Finally, *Landscape with Argonauts* is a vision of the disastrous collision between myth, everyday existence and aesthetic depiction writ large on a movie screen before Müller seems to pull back with an imagined camera, revealing the gritty, undeniable materiality of a haptic, if theatrical, world. It is the last section, *Landscape with Argonauts,* that, appropriately, acknowledges the flattening "landscaping" effect of depiction, ultimately equating landscape with death because only the inert, the dead can become landscape.

Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts seems to reflect the metatheatrical work of the landscape genre but does so while refusing to resign itself to the anthropocentric purgatory which landscape plays characteristically occupy. Instead, Müller calls for the terrain of his play to become mimetic in the extreme. If staged in found spaces, as Müller suggests, inseparable from the places of daily life, *Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts* eschews the insularity of the stage by stretching beyond the mimetic to something more. This particular move requires both a topical and formal awareness of the stakes of ecology—even as Müller uses other language to define his project—offering one more glimpse of a path toward an ecology theater.

Like *An Enemy of the People* and *The Cherry Orchard, Despoiled Shore/ Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts* deals explicitly with ecological disaster, in this case exploring an environment heaped with the detritus of society, a mise-en-scène

that exhausts the limits of naturalism with an accumulation of the garbage of thousands of generations.[84] For Müller, garbage is merely the broad manifestation of earth's most severe, insidious pollutant: humankind. As with *The Cherry Orchard*, Müller's play demonstrates characteristics of the landscape genre, so much so that the word "landscape" in the title of the last section of the piece seems to anticipate the genre. But like Chekhov, Müller turns the theatricality of his play back upon itself, using the metatheatrical self-awareness of *Landscape*'s narrator to distinguish the play from the reality of daily experience while, crucially, acknowledging the vast expanse of the everyday world that surrounds the play and humanity.

What most apparently unites *Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts* with the other plays in this chapter is its subject matter: pollution. What distinguishes it is its deeper examination of the potential for a formal ecology theater—one that *The Cherry Orchard* subtly suggests but, at least in the context of the early twentieth century stage and under the aegis of Stanislavski, could not completely embrace. Each part of the three-section text for the play—or, as Müller prefers, "synthetic fragment"—feels as if it has been anachronistically excavated from a post-apocalyptic future, available only through the projections of the imagination while simultaneously rising to the level of the uncannily real, the three- and, more aptly, four-dimensional. One also has the sense that, beyond their intentional textual fragmentation, these pieces represent only a sliver of the world Müller authors, that the play lives fully only in performance, its boundaries unexplored and perhaps untraceable. Coupled with its topical engagement of ecosystems and the consequences of their abuse, Müller's claim that his

[84] "The unattended garbage that accumulates on the margins of the realist stage is one of the sites for a possible ecological theater," notes Chaudhuri. See "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater,* 24. In Müller's ecological nightmare, the garbage takes center stage.

synthetic fragment requires the "naturalism of the stage" suggests, paradoxically, neither naturalism nor performance on stage, but a site-specific (an environmental) theater that can be read as engaging the complexities of ecology and, more specifically, situating itself within particular ecosystems. In order to clarify this claim, I will first explore the significance of the despoiled shores Müller stages.

Carl Weber describes the language of *Despoiled Shore* and, more broadly, the whole of Müller's play as evocative of "East Berlin suburbia with its lakes, commuter trains, housing developments, etc., a polluted landscape swarming with people whose minds are just as polluted," an appropriately grounded scenographic allusion to Müller's politically inflected critique of his homeland in the waning years of the Cold War.[85] But as with most of Müller's work, the specificity of political discourse quickly gives way to the broader horizons of mythological discourse, which he seems to suggest is both the origin and destination of human history. Yet Müller relentlessly refuses generality, as the hyperrealism of his mise-en-scène indicates. He places his scene instead outside of Berlin—east and west—but still in Germany at "A lake near Straussberg" with a "Despoiled shore Tracks/ Of flatheaded Argonauts/ Reeds Dead branches/ THIS TREE WILL NOT OUTGROW ME Dead fish/ Gleam in the mud Cookie boxes Feces FROMMS ACT CASINO," offering a series of morbid images that locate the play geographically but dislocate it chronologically.[86] The tree that will not outgrow the

[85] Carl Weber in Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 124.

[86] Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 127.

speaker suggests the end of fecundity, a vision further reinforced by the dead branches, dead fish and condom-strewn ground.[87]

While the pollution that chokes the scene could be chalked up as a temporary or, at the very least, remediable condition, Müller defines the problem more narrowly, setting the agenda for the whole piece as "the threat of the end we're facing, the 'end of growth'" at the conclusion of an unnamed disaster that will soon end the remainder of mankind and, potentially, any recognizable form of the ecosphere.[88] In fact, Müller goes so far as to conflate humanity with the material of the planet: "In the morgues/ The dead don't stare into the window/ They are not drumming on the john/ That's what they are Earth shat upon by the survivors/ SOME WERE HANGING FROM THE LAMPPOSTS THEIR TONGUES PROTRUDING."[89] Less dust to dust and more excrement to excrement, the scatological quality of Müller's ecosystem presages the play's eschatology, which only grows in momentum as the piece continues, ending in the full conflation of land and body, of flesh and terrain. When this end will come is unclear, though the uncanny familiarity of the despoiled shore and, later, of the landscape that Müller illustrates suggests this moment may lie in the relatively near future even as it draws upon the ancient narratives of the past. Once more, history and myth coalesce, a parallel to the conflation of bodies, whether flora or fauna (including humans), and the materiality of their environments in a gesture that defines the central ethos of ecology: all living things and their environments co-exist within a series of systems that themselves

[87] Weber helpfully explains in a footnote that "Fromms Acts" is a type of German prophylactic. Weber in Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 127.

[88] Müller quoted by Weber, *Hamletmachine*, 124.

[89] Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 127-28.

comprise the broader ecosphere. Here, Müller becomes, in the most direct sense, an "ecologist for theater."[90]

Medeamaterial, the next section of the text, maintains the apocalyptic space laid out in *Despoiled Shore* even as it moves to more anthropocentric concerns. Yet within Medea's screed against her faithless husband Jason is a second if troubled ecological exploration: the relationship between people and animals. Deep in her monologue, Medea laments, "Would I'd remained the animal I was/ Before my man made me into his woman."[91] This division between human and animal once more returns to the dichotomies of nature—and, indeed, Müller uses the term "nature" throughout—reminiscent of the landscape paradigm; but Medea acknowledges that she was, at least at one time, an animal, and she rejects the humanity and, more specifically, the femininity that Jason brought to her. A few lines later she declares, "I want to break mankind apart in two/ And live within the empty middle I/ No woman and no man."[92] Medea meets and surpasses Lady Macbeth's plea to be unsexed, aiming instead to destroy humanity by becoming inhuman herself. Given the tacit blame that humanity receives for the state of degradation to which this world—these despoiled shores—have fallen, this move may be an attempt to claim a more ideologically blameless position, to reject the race of the guilty and to embrace a more productive position within the ecosystem.

A few lines later, however, Medea rages, asking, "Who are you Who has dressed/ You in the bodies of my little children/ What animal is hiding in your eyes/ Do you play

[90] I borrow this (approximate) phrase from Elinor Fuchs. See Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater After Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 107.

[91] Ibid., 132.

[92] Ibid.

dead You won't deceive the mother/ You're actors nothing but liars and traitors/ Inhabited by dogs rats snakes you are/ It barks it squeaks it hisses I can hear it."[93] Here, animals become threatening. They are emblems of deceit that specifically represent the actor, the human participant in the theater, capable of venomous duplicity. So too Medea's desire to return to an animalistic state may be read as a longing for the primal power that animals can wield. But here too, a pro-ecological reading seems to fall apart, still overshadowed by anthropocentrism, metaphor and metatheatricality. Raising these issues as matters for critique is certainly fair game for ecocriticism, but taken out of the context of the larger project of *Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts*, they appear to complement the landscape genre more effectively than they do the ecology genre—a problem I will return to in a moment.

Carl Weber speculates that *Landscape with Argonauts* is "the dream of a man's (the author's?) voyage across oceans and landscapes in their terminal state of pollution by technologies, art and war, ending with the extermination of the voyager who turns into a landscape, the landscape of his death. An end that evokes the image of an ultimate holocaust."[94] As with *Despoiled Shore, Landscape with Argonauts* is strewn with literal trash, the detritus of a world destroyed, marking the exhaustion of naturalism. Weber's inclusion of "art" on the laundry list of causes for the "terminal state of pollution" of the planet articulates the core of the ecocriticism of the landscape genre, that the landscape perspective in art has itself contributed to the pollution of the planet by fostering the belief that humans have more than the mere ability but the right to control the planet, for

[93] Ibid.

[94] Weber in Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 125.

good or ill, first through the power of the gaze. Müller takes the garbage strewn across what was once the terrain of this world and sculpts it into a new aestheticized world as "The children," his argonaut-voyager-narrator tells us, "lay out landscapes with trash."[95] Here, trash and death are synonymous, a duality to which Müller quickly adds the human body of the Argonaut-voyager, forging a trio of decay that, like naturalism, seems to suggest full visibility through finality with everything, to borrow a line from Beckett's *Endgame*, "silent and still, and each thing in its last place, under the last dust."[96] Inertia renders the planet the perfect *objet d'art*.

How, then, can *Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts* be thought of as part of ecology theater if it bears such resemblance to landscape plays? The answer lies in the subtle manipulation of landscape into the dynamic and immediate materiality of ecology that Müller's work offers. He suggests that eschatology is the study of landscape, or vice versa, figuring landscape as a world in its final, settled form, indistinguishable from the uninhabitable space of the canvas. This points to the irony of the "landscape" in *Landscape with Argonauts*; as with Chekhov's breaking string in *The Cherry Orchard*, Müller's landscape allows him to acknowledge the theatricality of his play—something naturalism does not do—while grappling with the fact that his characters have moved to a new level of self-awareness that leads them to transcendence, as if Didi and Gogo were to move beyond the backstage hallways, through the stage door and out into the world, or as if Maeterlinck's blind, sighted at last, had left the forest.

[95] Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 135.

[96] Samuel Beckett, "Endgame," *Endgame* & *Act Without Words* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), 25.

Here and elsewhere, Müller seems to seek a way to cultivate life on the stage—though the word "stage" is figurative, as I will argue in a moment. The comparison with—and movement beyond—the semiotics of *Waiting for Godot* becomes explicit in this section as well. Here, a world loses the memory of itself, along with its history and its objectivity, slipping to landscape but for the self-awareness of the Argonaut-voyager. "DO YOU REMEMBER DO YOU NO I DON'T," he asks and answers, reminiscent again of Didi and Gogo, but his narrative voice persists, giving the lie to his amnesiac claims.[97] When the earth becomes nothing more than a dumping ground, fit only for viewing from afar, it slips to landscape.

Müller embraces this idea, but refuses to succumb to the inevitable. The Argonaut-voyager, whose body becomes a part of this landscape installation, maintains his narrative ability, and, in this sense, remains present in the story. His precise ontological status, however, is at best ambiguous—is he a spirit? Embodied elsewhere? Just a theatrical device?—if not altogether vague and not without irony. This is particularly true when he describes the scene as "the theatre of my death" in a literal movie house, "forests burn[ing] in EASTMAN COLOR," once more conflating experience with depiction until the two are symbolically and spatially one.[98] The fact that the Argonaut-voyager is able to break the subject-object duality to become both together—in full mimetic unity—correlates to the dynamics of theater ecology, which must embrace the fact of its own theatricality while reaching past itself to the ecosphere beyond, to some space beyond theater's own enclosed sphere of depiction. And just as

[97] Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 135.

[98] Ibid.

the image of the argonaut's cracked body amid a pile of other broken corpses seems to resolve itself into its final tableau, Müller makes one more reference to landscape and, moreover, to Gertrude Stein and her famous description of the world as a patchwork landscape seen from an airplane.[99] This time, however, the viewer actively alters the scene, with the "expected airplane" causing an "airblast" that "swept the corpses off the plateau."[100] His body becomes only then "the landscape of his death."[101] This last twist pushes landscape beyond its own timeless, endless paradigm and into the realm of the evanescent, the ephemeral, for even decay is a process of life wrought by living things and returning fertility to the ground. At this moment, Müller locates the precise line between the genres of landscape and ecology—but he doesn't finish here.

This section began with Müller's call for a type of site-specific staging he refers to, somewhat mystifyingly, as "the naturalism of the stage," a demand he quickly explains by suggesting a series of found spaces—"a lake near Straussberg that is a muddy swimming pool in Beverly Hills or the baths of a psychiatric hospital"—that could fully embody the mise-en-scène, spaces that could also immerse the audience in the world of the play.[102] Weber notes too that "[Müller] once mentioned that all three parts of the text are 'happening simultaneously,' and he'd leave it to the theatre to arrive at the appropriate presentation."[103] In the midst of these scenographic directions Müller adds,

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[99] Gertrude Stein, *Matisse, Picasso and Gertrude Stein.* Project Gutenberg. 2005; *The Geographical History of America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

[100] Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 135.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid., 126.

[103] Weber in Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 125.

referring in part to the ecological crises he is about to describe, that "The theatre's contribution to their prevention can only be their representation."[104]

I asked a moment ago if Müller might not be talking about "naturalism" in any traditional sense but, rather, as a way to describe the direct engagement with the materiality of the world that only theater can offer, in stark contrast to the visions of light and sound that dominate, for example, the cinema—and I argue that this is precisely what he is doing. It is tempting, here, to try to rehabilitate the term "naturalism" more fully, even as so many have attempted to reclaim "landscape" as an ecological—and not simply ecocritical—term. The possibilities are tantalizing: perhaps the naturalism he envisions could be renamed "deep naturalism." Just as deep ecology eschewed the lingering anthropocentrism inherent in resourcism and preservation in favor of a deep, at times militant equality for all living things, could "deep naturalism" reject the artifice and humanism of traditional naturalism in favor of a more direct engagement with the "real" spaces of the everyday world including the environments of the ecosphere? Though enticing, I shy away from this possibility because I fear that, despite its potential, the reuse of the term "naturalism" would cause the entire project of an ecocritical theater to slip deeper into the discursive mire where it has foundered for twenty years. Kirk Williams, after all, notes that "Naturalism as aesthetic strategy is profoundly conservative and deeply antipathetic to change," and constant change in service of balance lies at the

[104] Müller, *Hamletmachine*, 126. Note that I differentiate between Müller's use of the term "representation," which does not preclude but, as I argue, promotes connection with the ecosystem through site-specific performance, and the term "depiction," which I use to suggest stage-bound and synthetic reproduction of ecosystems.

center of both ecology and Müller's ecologically-minded synthetic fragment.[105] Instead, I want to rechristen Müller's naturalism as a specific type of environmental theater, particularly, environmental ecology theater, in which both the topical and formal potential of theater to engage with ecological concerns can be realized through direct contact with the ecosystem, pressuring if not surpassing the bounds of mimesis. It is here that ecology theater finds its greatest boon and, potentially, its greatest challenge.

When all of its sections are performed in site-specific spaces simultaneously with one another, *Despoiled Shore/Medeamaterial/ Landscape with Argonauts* has the potential to slip the bounds of landscape more fully than it ever could on the proscenium stage, or likely any stage for that matter. Elinor Fuchs writes at some length about the site-specific performances of Müller's synthetic fragments undertaken by Tina Landau and Ulla Neuerberg. Landau's *Despoiled Shore*, part of her "detached" production of the play, stood "against the charred girders of burnt-out piers and the harsh neon of commercial New Jersey." Neuerberg's fragment occupied an old, once-abandoned school building in New York City, "a space," Fuchs explains, "itself narrowly rescued from the despoliation of Müller's theme."[106] Both of these pieces do the work of the ecology genre a great service simply by moving into the world, but Landau's canny decision to place the piece outdoors shifts her production as close to the naturalism Müller may have envisioned as possible. The detachment of *Despoiled Shore* from the remainder of the synthetic fragment, however, complicates this gesture, suggesting again a kind of

[105] Kirk Williams, "Anti-Theatricality and the Limits of Naturalism," in *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage*, Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 97-98.

[106] Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, 136-37.

environmental landscape through its singular focus. I explore the potential for both environmental and, more particularly, immersive landscape and ecology productions throughout the remainder of this dissertation. For now, however, I will say that by suggesting site-specificity as the medium most fully able to capture the materiality of theater and by asserting that the sole contribution theater can make to preventing the climatic disasters on the way—as well as those that have already arrived—is their representation, Müller unites the topical and formal categories of ecology theater. In the process, he also provides a template for a fully realized ecology theater, one that thrives beyond the threshold of the stage and within the ecosystem itself. Müller points to the exploration of spaces that may encompass both art and life, and, in so doing, demonstrates that life on the stage, even in the context of topical ecology, is a dim reflection of what life in the theater could be. To explore this possibility more fully, we must, perhaps ironically, leave the stage and its house behind in search of the *oikos*, that other house, which gave the ecosphere its name.

Conclusion: "worlds of irreducible strangeness"[107]

The theater's stages have been home to ecological subjects for over a century, and likely far longer. From the early "economies of nature" to the radical principles of deep ecology, theater has grappled with and occasionally floundered in the presence of ecology as much as has any other field that embarks on ecocritical investigation. The growth of a theatrical eco-canon will be determined in part by artists' and critics' willingness to continue the search for signs of ecological engagement, both topical and formal, in the theatrical canon and beyond. But while theater may address the subject of

[107] Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater*, 30.

ecology on its stages, life on the stage, with apologies to Chekhov, cannot replicate life as it really is. Theater, however, is not limited to the stage. The best hope for the success of an ecology theater at a formal level may emerge when the ecology genre escapes the stage altogether.

Lynn Jacobson, who has praised *An Enemy of the People* as a principal example of the ecocanon, was struck by the particular impact of the play when it was produced in Lowell, Massachusetts near the once notoriously diseased Merrimack River.[108] The Merrick Theater's production of *An Enemy of the People* was performed on a conventional stage with subtle scenographic references to Lowell's history the only clues that this version of the piece was more particular to nineteenth-century New England than Norway. Jacobson reports that although the production was not site-specific in a rigorous, technical sense, the play's performance at the general location of a small but nonetheless devastating ecological disaster allowed the ecocritical potential of *An Enemy of the People* to resonate all the more clearly. But imagine the ecological potential of the play were it performed in a true, site-specific context.[109]

Jacobson calls performances like the Merrick Theater's *An Enemy of the People* "theater of place."[110] In some sense, all plays that invoke ecological concerns, that situate themselves within an ecosystemic mise-en-scène might become "theaters of place" in

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[108] Jacobson explains that "In the 19th century, while the Merrimack River was powering the turbines that were lining the pockets of Lowell's industrialists, it was also filling with human waste, endangering its citizens." This pollution led to a two-year typhoid epidemic that sickened almost five hundred people and killed over a hundred. Jacobson, "Green Theater," in *Theater,* 17.

[109] I am not necessarily suggesting a theatrical field trip to a polluted waterway; the contamination of the Merrimack River has long since been resolved. On the other hand, staging performances at ecologically compromised sites would certainly limit any gap between the depiction of an ecosystem and the ecosystem itself in a way particularly memorable to the audience.

[110] Jacobson, "Green Theater," in *Theater,* 16.

pursuit of ecocritical insight. A play about specificity of place performed onstage cannot, ecocritically speaking, have the same impact or formal consistency as one performed both about and within a particular ecosystem. Moreover, by situating ecological theater onstage, artists risk mistaking the ecosystem's aesthetic double for the ecosystem itself, relegating ecology theater to an endless cycle of mimesis. Arnold Aronson observes that in the "illusionistic style" that characterizes naturalist and realist performances, including those of Ibsen's work, "the so-called real world is replicated as closely as possible; objects come to represent themselves so that the symbolically signifying space of the stage is mistaken for that which is signified."[111] This mimetic confusion reifies the very rupture that landscape criticizes and that ecology theater resists.

The ecocritic Timothy Morton asks, "If ecology is about *collapsing* distances (between human and animal, society and environment, subject and object), then how much sense does it make to rely on a strategy or reading that keeps reestablishing (aesthetic) distance?"[112] The strategy to which Morton refers is mimesis or, as he terms it, "ecomimesis." Though he focuses primarily on "nature writing," his argument that ecomimesis "partly militates *against* ecology rather than for it" holds for theater as well. He explains that "By setting up nature as an object 'over there'—a pristine wilderness beyond all trace of human contact—[ecomimesis] re-establishes the very separation it seeks to abolish."[113] Performing the ecology genre as site-specific theater would, I argue, help to resolve this issue, at least to a degree. This is why the performance modes of

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[111] Arnold Aronson, "The Symbolist Scenography of Arthur Miller," *Arthur Miller's America: Theater & Culture in a Time of Change*, Enoch Brater, ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 80.

[112] Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 154.

[113] Ibid., 54, 125.

environmental and, moreover, immersive and site-specific theater are crucial to the realization of a formal ecology theater.

For the remainder of this dissertation, I address the impact of environmental staging on the genres of landscape and ecology theater. In the fourth chapter, I further consider the impact of environmental and, more particularly, immersive, site-specific performance on ecology theater. But prior to that, in the third chapter, I turn to the unlikely pairing of environmental staging and landscape theater. There, I address audiences' direct encounters with what Una Chaudhuri has called the "paradox of man-made nature" in two immersive productions.[114] Through these "fake worlds of irreducible strangeness," I again seek out the "natural" ruptures that landscape generates and that landscape theater criticizes.[115] I also attempt to resolve the seemingly paradoxical persistence of landscape framing, even as audiences step beyond the physical boundary of the stage and into the landscape world visible, previously, only in the Claude Glass or within the border of the proscenium frame.

[114] Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake,'" in *Theater,* 30.

[115] Ibid.

PART II

NEGOTIATING TERRAIN:

ENVIRONMENTAL STAGING

IN LANDSCAPE THEATER AND ECOLOGY THEATER

Chapter 3

"Through the Looking-Glass": Environmental Landscape Theater[1]

Nature is a haunted house–but Art–is a house that tries to be haunted.

—Emily Dickinson[2]

I stood before a mirror, the glass reflecting back the image of a different space than the one I believed I occupied. Behind me, a pristine bed, freshly made, and children's toys in their appointed places. But in the mirror, I saw a horror of blood in winding sheets, the aftermath of murder, and the faintest hint of my own image— a masked stranger, bestial and pale—as if my ghost and I occupied both spaces simultaneously, two conflicting realities, neither one "real." As I slipped out of the Macduff children's bedroom and into the next area of the performance environment, I found myself struck, and not for the first time that evening, by the senses of duality and dislocation that wind through the haunted halls of Punchdrunk's immersive production *Sleep No More*. In moments, I was "outside" in a foggy courtyard, suspended in perpetual midnight. I could even feel a light, evening breeze and smell the scent of graveyard dirt blowing from the next room—and it is a *room*. Along with the rest of the audience, spread across the huge territory of the production, I stood in an uncanny nowhere, painstakingly designed to feel as if it is somewhere. With the ghost of vodka (real? in a performance?)—the revenant of an earlier interaction with one of the denizens of this place—still on my tongue, I walked to the blackened edge of this wrecked garden and felt

[1] Lewis Carroll, "Alice Through the Looking-Glass," *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass* (New York: Signet Classic, 1960).

[2] Emily Dickinson quoted in Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *Emily Dickinson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 295.

the cinder block of the painted wall like solid air, an illusion suggesting a darkened expanse beyond, the limit of this strange world, if it is a world.

The moments from *Sleep No More* I recount here reflect the utterly lush, sensory involvement of the production's synthetic environment, one without a physical frame but, nevertheless, as deeply informed by the performance frame as any proscenium production. Arnold Aronson explains that "The proscenium arch," when it frames rich, illusionistic scenography, "is a kind of looking glass and if, like Alice, we were to go through it, we would find ourselves in a complete and total world."[3] Within the corridors of *Sleep No More*, one experiences precisely what it would be like to step across the threshold of the proscenium and into what may be one of the most lavishly appointed productions ever staged, but without destroying the integrity of the stage-world. Applying this concept more broadly, environmental and, to greater extremes, immersive theater allow audiences to step through the Looking-glass and into the sumptuous, fictive worlds that would normally be bound by the limits of the stage. But like Alice's Looking-glass world, *Sleep No More* also embodies the "irreducible strangeness" Una Chaudhuri describes as inherent to hyper-mimetic, but undeniably synthetic, "man-made" worlds.[4] The phenomenological and ontological confusion that the space engenders makes *Sleep No More* and, with it, Maria Irene Fornes' groundbreaking environmental play *Fefu and Her Friends* ideal candidates for exploring the effects of environmental performance on ecocritical and, more particularly, landscape theater.

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[3] Arnold Aronson, "The Symbolist Scenography of Arthur Miller," *Arthur Miller's America: Theater & Culture in a Time of Change*, Enoch Brater, ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 89.

[4] Una Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be A Lot of Fish in that Lake': Toward an Ecological Theater," *Theater* 25:1 (Spring/Summer 1994), 30.

Environmental performance refers to any kind of staging that is "nonfrontal," describing a wide variety of staging methods, all of which orient the spectator at the "center of the event," as Aronson explains.[5] Immersive staging, a more particular iteration of environmental staging, surrounds the audience with performance environments. At their most extreme, these environments begin to mimic the sorts of environments one might encounter in the "real" world or even the "natural" world so that the line between reality and performance can seem to blur. The creation of detailed but synthetic environments, rather than occupation of true "found" space, coupled with the resulting sense of deep engagement its audiences experience during each performance are key to Punchdrunk's self-defined "immersion":

> Punchdrunk applies the word immersive to its work in order to distinguish it from the familiar conventions of site specific and traditional promenade theatre. The physical freedom to explore the sensory and imaginative world of a Punchdrunk show without compulsion or explicit direction sets it apart from the standard practice of viewing theatre in unconventional locations.[6]

The sense that one has unfettered liberty to roam Punchdrunk's sets is part of the charm of *Sleep No More,* but, as I argue in this chapter, this freedom is largely illusory. Nor is the particular site of *Sleep No More* essential to the dramaturgy or scenography of the piece—beyond the necessity for a large space that could be altered to suit Punchdrunk's needs.[7] Centrally, however, immersive work such as Punchdrunk's allows audiences to

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[5] Arnold Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 1, 13.

[6] Punchdrunk.com: http://punchdrunk.com/faq Accessed June 3, 2014.

[7] This is not to say that in performing the piece in different locations, as it has for the last decade, Punchdrunk has not altered *Sleep No More* to fit the architecture of different venues. I mean instead that the specific identities of the venues themselves—one was an old school, another the combination of two old nightclubs—is not crucial to the meaning of the production.

engage with the spaces and, sometimes, the actions of the characters—with theatrical worlds and their inhabitants.

Environmental and, more specifically, immersive theater seem as if they would readily invite spectators into theatrical worlds in a way that transcends framing and boundaries and that opens up the audience's ability to move into the worlds being portrayed not just physically but conceptually. So, too, environmental theater would seem to offer the opportunity to minimize the supposed gap between humans and nature, favoring the ecology model of performance over the landscape model by allowing audiences direct access to the ecosystem. While all of this is indeed possible through environmental performance, it is not compulsory. Immersive, environmental theater can make just as much use of framing and distancing techniques as does frontal, proscenium staging, albeit through different methods. So too, immersive staging is just as rife with anthropocentric attitudes as any naturalist production and, in combination with the genre of landscape theater, can also allow for the critique of these attitudes.

From an ecocritical perspective, then, immersion, the pinnacle of Artaudian total theater, is just as problematic as distance, the specter of *Verfremdungseffekt*, when it comes to landscape theater. The illusion of immersion, of fully invested connection with a world, reifies the sense that humans do not need the ecosphere, that they can create all the *oikoi* they need themselves. A synthetic, insular and immersive production that draws audiences into a virtual world simultaneously pulls the same audiences away from the ecosphere. Total theater in virtual environments, therefore, resists ecological engagement.

The "total theater" of Punchdrunk's *Macbeth*-inspired environmental production *Sleep No More* premiered in its current incarnation in New York City in 2011 after earlier

stints in London and Boston over the previous ten years. Its present residence is the spectral McKittrick Hotel, "the finest and most decadent luxury hotel of its time," according to Punchdrunk's fabricated legend, until it was mysteriously "sealed from the public" in 1939, as it has remained ever since.[8] "Until now… ."[9] Audience members enter the hotel through a maze, a conduit between one world, one time and another. Once inside, they find little, if anything, that resembles a traditional theatrical experience. Instead, they are ordered to wear masks and remain silent, and then left to wander the halls of the hotel as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* intermingled with Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and Daphne Du Maurier's novel (and Hitchcock's film adaptation of) *Rebecca* play out all around, three times in total during the three hour duration of each performance.[10] There is little speech—the performers are all dancers whose physical work ranges from the meticulous to the astounding—but an abundance of scenographic detail. Audience members—or "guests," in the play's parlance—are invited to wander freely through the five "official" floors of the performance space, to open every door and even to sample the candy in the candy shop (not necessarily a wise idea but allowed nonetheless).[11] This is perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of *Sleep No More*. Audiences have what appears to be unlimited access to the spaces through which they move and the objects therein, almost characters themselves, fully "immersed" in the world they occupy along

[8] *Sleep No More* website, http://www.sleepnomorenyc.com/hotel.htm. Accessed: April 16, 2011. The McKittrick, whose name derives from the hotel in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, was created from two prior club spaces and encompasses a substantial portion of 27th street between 10th and 11th Avenues in Manhattan.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Named characters from Du Maurier's gothic romance *Rebecca*—Mrs. Danvers, Mrs. De Winter—appeared in both the Boston and London versions of the play but have since been altered, apparently to avoid problems with copyright violation.

[11] There are, as I will discuss in a moment, actually six floors in total. The top floor is secret.

with the characters. Yet the sense of freedom the audience experiences is, as I have mentioned, largely illusory as is the sense of total scenographic representation suggested by the set, so reminiscent of naturalism's claims of total visibility.

Sleep No More is painstakingly regulated, from the music, which controls the actors movements down to the second, to the lighting that, coupled with the music, also subtly manipulates the decisions audience members make about where they will linger and when they will move on.[12] A significant part of the lush set includes ostensibly natural elements—winding vines, moving trees and a rustic apothecary that smells of loamy peat. The director Felix Barrett has discussed in detail the power of nature in the play. But the synthetic representation of nature signals a return to the illusions of naturalism, for the world of *Sleep No More* is as bounded as any stage, and, despite the absence of a traditional division between audience and performer, the "guests" of the production remain apart, other, even ghostly. These factors might be sufficient to call *Sleep No More* a landscape play, but the secret sixth floor, which holds a landscape model, a tiny representation of the world that *Sleep No More* enfolds, typifies the kind of critical perspective that characterizes the landscape genre. Despite its immersive, multifocal, environmental staging, *Sleep No More* is a landscape play.

Its recent acclaim notwithstanding, Punchdrunk is far from the first theater company to explore environmental work. In the 1960s, Allan Kaprow's Happenings

[12] Punchdrunk's director Felix Barrett explains that "In the case of Sleep No More in New York, we have 14 synced soundtracks around the building. It's important that everything starts at the same time, but it also means we can control the sonic shape of the entire site to echo and support the narrative; when the dynamic's picking up on a certain floor we can lower or mute the acoustic environment either side of it. It's like a rocking ship – when one bow rears up and is prominent, everything else needs to dip into the water to accommodate it." Barrett quoted in Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 162.

brought performance environments into the world of experimental theater. Later, Richard Schechner, inspired by Kaprow, chose the term "environmental" to describe his frequently immersive, often confrontational performances. At the end of the 1970s, playwright Maria Irene Fornes penned the text of her play *Fefu and Her Friends* specifically with environmental staging in mind. She recalls that, while touring the Relativity Lab New York City where the initial performances of the piece were produced by the New York Theatre Strategy beginning on May 5, 1977,[13]

> I did not like the space I found because it had large columns. But then I was taken backstage to the rooms the audience could not see. I saw the dressing room, and I thought. "How nice. This could be a room in Fefu's house." Then I was taken to the greenroom. I thought that this also could be a room in Fefu's house. Then we went to the business office to discuss terms. That office was the study of Fefu's house ... I asked if we could use all of their rooms for the performances, and they agreed. […] People asked me, when the play opened, if I had written those scenes to be done in different rooms and then found the space. No. They were written that way because the space was there.[14]

Fefu, however, presents more than just a challenge, formidable and significant though it remains, to the theater's staging conventions. Through her play, Fornes dares her audiences to question their own perspectives and, moreover, the ethical significance of perspective, of place and boundary as literal and figurative regulators for sex, gender and autonomy. Through her interrogation of misogyny and equally unflinching scrutiny of feminist ideals, Fornes also conducts a deep examination of nature, refiguring *Fefu's* experimentation with staging and spectatorship as challenges to the unifocal perspectives of anthropocentricity. *Fefu*'s audiences, like those of *Sleep No More*, step not just

[13] Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1990), 4.

[14] Fornes quoted in Penny Farfan, "Feminism, Metatheatricality, and *Mise-en-scène* in Maria Irene Fornes's *Fefu and Her Friends*," *Modern Drama* 40:4 (Winter 1997), 442-43.

through the Looking-glass to enter the space of environmental performance, they step through the Claude Glass. It is to Fornes' curious world that I turn first.

"Environment knocks at the gateway": Shifting Perspective in Maria Irene Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends*[15]

"Life is theater. Theater is life. If we're showing what life is, can be, we must do theater," declares Emma, one of the seven friends named in the title of Maria Irene Fornes' play *Fefu and Her Friends.* [16] A "rehearsal" defines the central action of the play. Here, Fefu (short for Stephany) and her friends practice a talk on arts and education—although the audience hears only a portion of Emma's speech—with a specific focus on environmental (i.e. ecosystemic) knowledge. The group meets to practice the lecture, complete with costumes and props, at Fefu's country estate and, through the course of an afternoon in 1935, address everything from the complexities of female relationships and misogyny to metaphysics and systems of perception. Intertwined with these metatheatrical matters, a mystery unfolds regarding the character Julia's paralysis, and the play culminates in her (unconfirmed) death.[17] As the play develops, Julia becomes a metaphorical figure, absorbing secondhand the violence directed at animals, at nature, even as she functions as a totem for the misogyny perpetrated upon women. That this

[15] Fornes, *Fefu and Her* Friends, 46.

[16] Ibid. 22.

[17] The ambiguity of Julia's death is often overlooked. Elinor Fuchs explains that "We do not finally know what happens at the end of this play, not even whether Julia has actually died, though many critics declare this as a certainty. The pattern of affirmative circularity does not rescue the women from their invisible oppression, nor us from the dilemma of uncertain agency and meaning." Fuchs, "*Fefu and Her Friends*: The View from the Stone," *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes*, Marc Robinson, ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 108.

violence is meted out in the end by Fefu herself, who exemplifies the uneasy feminist and, moreover, ecocritical aspects of Fornes' play, signals the emergence of what I argue is an embattled ecofeminism, perpetuated dramaturgically by *Fefu and Her Friends*' reliance upon natural images and motifs as metaphorical tools to describe women rather than as direct references to ecological issues.[18]

Beyond *Fefu and Her Friends*' challenging feminist ethos, which would garner Fornes the reputation as both a formidable creative force and uncompromising social critic, the piece is best known for its environmental performance. When staged environmentally, as it was in its earliest production in New York City in the late 1970s, *Fefu* begins quite traditionally, with Part I of the production, set in a living room, playing in a frontal orientation to the audience.[19] In Part II, however, the performance adopts what Arnold Aronson calls a "*Moving audience—stationary performance*" form of environmental theater. [20] In the case of *Fefu*, the audience divides into four groups and moves between a series of four rooms. Each audience group necessarily watches these scenes in varying order relative to the other groups, meaning that each group experiences the plot of the play slightly differently, which some critics have argued shifts the

[18] According to the ecocritic Max Oelschlaeger, ecofeminism argues that "the many problems of human relations, and relations between the human and nonhuman words, will not be resolved until androcentric institutions, values, and ideology are eradicated," a claim predicated upon the ideas that "ecosystemic malaise and abuse is rooted in androcentric concepts, values and institutions," and that "relations of complementarity rather than superiority between culture and nature, the human and nonhuman, and male and female are desirable." See Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 310. Given the rough treatment ecological and feminist ideals receive throughout the play, I use "ecofeminism" to denote what is still, in the end, criticism of misogyny and anthropocentricity, but rendered, as I have described previously with reference to the landscape genre, as a kind of *via negativa* to feminist and ecological insight.

[19] Discussing the piece's non-traditional spatial dynamics, Fornes has explained that the structure of the play emerged in part from the space under consideration as the performance space for *Fefu*'s first production. Marc Robinson, "Introduction," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes,* 16.

[20] Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*, 12.

perspective of the play away from the singular, patriarchal gaze typical of both realism and, as I have argued, landscape. Following this perambulatory middle section, the audience then gathers into a single group for Part III, which is staged frontally, signaling a return to the singular perspective of the hierarchical gaze, but one, a number of critics have argued, that has been destabilized by the preceding multi-focal experience of the audience.

W. B. Worthen discusses this shift between the play's environmental and frontal staging, noting that "In *Fefu and Her Friends,* vision is achieved only through a strategy of displacement, by standing outside the theatrical 'formula' of realism in order to witness its 'bias.'"[21] As a result, the audience member is "returned to the auditorium in Part III, to assume the role of 'spectator' with a fuller sense of the social legitimacy embodied in that perspective […]."[22] Worthen points specifically to the patriarchal gaze as the legitimized perspective that the staging of *Fefu and Her Friends* resists. Here, I take up Worthen's claim in order to argue that the shift into and out of environmental staging in *Fefu* primes the audience, as Worthen says, to scrutinize realism's self-proclaimed legitimacy with regard to its presentation of women and, I would add, nature. In short, *Fefu*'s perspectival shift engenders ecofeminist criticism and, in turn, landscape criticism of privileged perspectives, whether misogynist or anthropocentric. *Fefu*'s return to the—now critically informed—stasis of the frontal gaze, its subtle if insistent framing and its replication of the rupture inherent in the concept of nature (and echoed in the play through the ruptures produced by misogyny) are characteristic of the landscape genre.

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[21] W.B. Worthen, "Still Playing Games: Ideology and Performance in the Theater of Maria Irene Fornes," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes*, 73-4.

[22] Ibid., 74.

These features, in combination with the audience's perambulatory and multi-focal spectatorship, make *Fefu and Her Friends* an environmental landscape play.

The piece's unorthodox staging, conflicted treatment of feminism and ecology, and resistance to oversimplified social and critical categories highlight *Fefu*'s complex nexus of form and content, less complementary than it is oppositional. Worthen explains that "Rather than naturalizing theatrical performance by assimilating the various 'enunciators' of the stage—acting, music set design, audience disposition—to a privileged gestural style encoded in the dramatic text (the strategy of stage realism, for instance), Fornes's plays suspend the identification between the drama and its staging," a phenomenon Worthen refers to as "ideological dislocation."[23] This oppositional dynamic reflects a similar tension among the elements of both the feminist and ecocritical ethics explored in the play and among the component parts of its staging. In short, these tensions accentuate less an egalitarian disposition or ecological ideology in the play's content or form and more the play's ideological, dramaturgical and formal discontinuities. This is exemplified in part by *Fefu*'s insistence upon its own theatricality even as it demonstrates the power of environmental immersion in what is, in the end, a relentlessly fictional world. I will begin to explore this dynamic by examining *Fefu*'s ecofeminist rhetoric, particularly prominent in the play's "rehearsal" scene and during one of the site-specific scenes staged "outdoors" in Part II.[24]

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[23] Ibid., 62.

[24] In the Relativity Lab (1977), American Place (1978) and Greenhouse Theater (1979) productions, the scene "On the Lawn" was performed indoors. Fuchs, "The View From the Stone," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes*, 89; Jules Aarons, "*Fefu and Her Friends* by Maria Irene Fornes." *Theatre Journal* 23:2 (May 1980), 166-67.

Emma Sheridan Fry, Fornes tells us in a footnote to the play, "taught acting to children at The Educational Alliance in New York from 1903 to 1909." In 1917, Fry's book *Educational Dramatics* was published by Lloyd Adams Noble, Fornes explains, adding that the speech Emma (perhaps Fry's namesake) rehearses is excerpted from Fry's prologue, titled "The Science of Educational Dramatics."[25] Emma begins her speech with the following unmistakably metatheatrical text, which she illustrates, Fornes' stage directions indicate, through "interpretive gestures and movements that cover the stage areas":

> Environment knocks at the gateway of the senses. A rain of summons beats upon us day and night. . . . We do not answer. Everything around us shouts against our deafness, struggles with out unwillingness, batters our walls, flashes into our blindness, strives to sieve through us at every pore, begging, fighting, insisting. It shouts, "Where are you? Where are you? But we are deaf. The signals do no reach us.[26]

After grappling with the sheltered insensibility of modern humans, Emma asks, "What is Environment? Our mate, our true mate that clamors for our reunion," before declaring, triumphantly,

> We will meet him. We will seize all, learn all, know all here, that we may fare further on the great quest! The task of Now is only a step toward the task of the Whole! Let us then seek the laws governing real life forces, that coming into their own, they may create, develop and reconstruct. Let us awaken life dormant! Let us boldly, seizing the star of our intent, lift it

[25] Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends,* 46. Elinor Fuchs provides this detailed insight into Fry's theories: "Emma Sheridan Fry was one of the remarkable arts educators of the first two decades of the twentieth century, teaching children dramatic expression in the same years in which [Isadora] Duncan's reputation was at its height. At the Educational Alliance in New York City, she founded and ran the Children's Educational Theatre. In an influential short book, *Educational Dramatics*, published in 1913 and again in a revised edition in 1917, Fry set forth the vitalistic principles, so close to those of Duncan, which governed her work. The high calling of the dramatic educator, wrote Fry, was not mere preparation for a show, but the development of the entire human being through the cultivation of the Dramatic Instinct, a reflection of the consciousness of God. Fry thought of dramatic expression as Duncan thought of dance expression, as the individual "interconnected with the cosmos." Fuchs, "The View from the Stone," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes*, 100.

[26] Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends,* 46.

> as the lantern of our necessity, and let it shine over the darkness of our compliance. Come! The light shines. Come! It brightens our way. Come! Don't let its glorious light pass you by! Come! The day has come![27]

The complexity of this passage reveals the conflicted rhetoric of ecofeminism throughout *Fefu and Her Friends.*

Emma's early lament of the "deafness" and "blindness" of a modern society inured to the rich sensory call of the world evokes criticism reminiscent of the landscape theater genre, with a metatheatrical nod to the environmental staging the audience would have just experienced during Part II of the play. If environment is, as she declares by the end of her manifesto, the sign and cure for the ills of numbed humanity, then the shift into environmental staging might offer a broader link between the theater and the world. To add to the metatheatrical impact of his moment, recall that Emma utters these words in the middle of a "rehearsal" staged within a play. This is the same Emma who blithely proclaims that "Life is theater. Theater is life. If we're showing what life is, can be, we must do theater," an idea haunted by the specters of realism and naturalism.[28] She offers these speeches not in the midst of an environmental moment but facing the audience in a traditional, frontal arrangement, either to underscore the tension between the two modes of performance or, more ironically, to emphasize the fact that the "world" from which she speaks is the stage itself, another move reminiscent not of ecology theater but of landscape theater. Moreover, when she reaches a climactic declaration about the ecstasies of reuniting with the environment, Emma anthropomorphizes the world as "him," an odd push against the more traditional—and certainly more ecofeminist—notion

[27] Ibid., 47-48.

[28] Ibid., 22.

that the world is feminine, typified by the archetype of Mother Nature.[29] The gap between the seeming intent of the passage, encouraging people to immerse themselves in the sensory experience of the world, and the conventional frame of its performance combine with the lacuna between the play's feminism and its masculine, landscape-directed language and staging in portions of the performance to throw the ecofeminist leanings of *Fefu* into question.

A similar tension arises between Emma and Fefu in Part II of the play. Set "On the Lawn," this scene occurs between the only "two women," Elinor Fuchs notes, who are "not afraid, symbolically, to leave the house," an act that defies the conventional spatial arrangement of men and women in the play: the men belong outside, the women inside.[30] Fuchs further observes that this scene, unlike the majority of the other scenes in the play except for one, is "set in a less realistic, more symbolic world."[31] The set, "a bench or a tree stump," as Fornes describes it, is both minimalistic and reminiscent of the scenography of *Waiting for Godot*, another symbolic world minimally rooted in the mimetic. Fuchs adds, "This is the only represented scene that abandons the house for the sunlight and air Fefu associates with men. And they are doing somewhat mannish things for 1930s women: They are talking openly about sex while swinging at croquet balls."[32]

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[29] Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness,* 310.

[30] Fuchs, "The View from the Stone," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes*, 93. The play is notably devoid of any onstage appearance by male characters and, subsequently, male actors—all of the men mentioned in the play remain outdoors (and offstage) for the duration of the performance while the women, with the exceptions of Emma and Fefu herself, remain indoors. Penny Farfan notes that the absence of men was a matter contested by some male members of the audience during the production's second run at the America Place Theatre in 1978. Farfan, "Feminism, Metatheatricality, and *Mise-en-scène,"* in *Modern* Drama, 450.

[31] Fuchs, "The View from the Stone," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes*, 93.

[32] Ibid.

Once again, the subjects of nature and the feminine emerge in tandem with one another, but, as in other cases, nature acts as a palpable symbol to explain the metaphors for sex and gender that Fefu and Emma examine. In this schematically natural world, where the laws of nature are being trampled like the lawn under a game of croquet, the conversation turns to the slimy underside of humans: genitals. But to understand fully the context of this conversation, we must return to an earlier moment between Fefu and Christina.

Midway through Part I, Fefu asks Christina, "Have you ever turned a stone over in damp soil?" continuing, "And when you turn it there are worms crawling on it? […] And it's damp and full of fungus?" After Christina responds in the affirmative to each of Fefu's inquiries, the latter adds, "Were you revolted?" Their conversation, precipitated by Fefu's suggestion that she is excited at the idea of "women being loathsome," is revolting to Christina. [33] Yet she admits that she is fascinated by the sliminess of natural life on the stone's underside. "There you have it!" Fefu declares, "You too are fascinated with revulsion," continuing " You see, that which is exposed to the exterior . . . is smooth and dry and clean. That which is not . . . underneath, is slimy and filled with fungus and crawling with worms. It is another life that is parallel to the one we manifest. It's there. The way worms are underneath the stone. If you don't recognize it . . . (*Whispering*.) it eats you."[34] The dense rhetoric of this section reveals complex feminism, ecocriticism and metatheatricality. Fefu, who is often depicted as masculine or a male-sympathizer, simultaneously articulates a misogynistic approach to both female sex and feminine gender through language that also figures the messy realities of the ecosystem as the

[33] Fornes, *Fefu and Her* Friends, 8-9.

[34] Ibid., 9-10.

paradoxically grotesque yet potentially desirable other. It is this metaphor, Fuchs argues, that informs the "lawn" scene between Fefu and Emma.

Back out "On the Lawn," Fornes confronts the tension between acceptable and unacceptable representations of femininity, again through comparison to the aesthetic standards assigned to nature. Here, Fuchs explains, "Fefu and Emma play croquet on the lawn, in effect on the 'clean, dry, and smooth' upper side of the stone," emphasizing language that points to an environment that is made of natural materials but that is shaped and curated by *man*kind, with particular emphasis on the masculine orientation of the term.[35] There is an abundance of landscape ideas here. First, the crafted, coiffed, scenographic description—a reflection, generally, of its staging, especially when, as in its earliest productions, the play is staged in an indoor space—of the lawn itself resonates with the idea of synthetic, human-generated manipulation of nature. Second, Emma's and Fefu's presence on the lawn is itself an act of boundary crossing, both a literal and figurative transgression in a play filled with metaphorically loaded spatial boundaries. They have not, like Didi and Gogo, flirted with departing the stage space, but they have transgressed the rules of femininity in their world. Third and finally, surrounding these ideas is the haunting notion of a "second life," of nature dwelling within what is already a fictive, false "life" inside the theater.

Most significantly to the environmental features of *Fefu*, the matter of boundaries extends beyond the fictive space of the play and into staged space. Worthen links the multifocal, environmental positioning of the audience in Part II of the play with the subversion of the male gaze, arguing, "Fornes not only draws the audience into the

[35] Fuchs, "The View from the Stone," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes,* 92.

performance space, she actively challenges and suspends the epistemological structure of realistic vision, predicated as it is on an invisible, singular, motionless, masculine interpreter situated outside the field of dramatic *and* theatrical activity."[36] The "structure of realistic vision" that Worthen indicates is analogous to the traditionally unifocal landscape perspective that frames and controls nature. Once more, the potential for an ecofeminist interpretation of the play emerges. Worthen continues:

> *Fefu and Her Friends* decenters the absent "spectator" as the site of authentic interpretation, replacing "him" with a self-evidently theatricalized body, an "audience," a community sharing irreconcilable yet interdependent experiences. The perspective offered by the realistic box set appears to construct a community of witnesses, but is in fact grounded in the sight of a single observer; the realistic audiences sees with a single eye. *Fefu* challenges the "theory" of realistic theater at its source by dramatizing—and displacing—the covert authority of the constitutive *theoros* of naturalism and the social order it reproduces: the offstage man.[37]

Worthen's argument culminates in a reading of the end of the play in which Fefu attempts to disrupt the ailing Julia's hallucinations by revealing that she has "seen" Julia walking, calling her insane and, finally, pleading with Julia to fight. When this moment passes, Fefu grabs a rifle and shoots a white rabbit out on the lawn, perhaps the same lawn on which Fefu and Emma earlier committed their own subversion of masculine space. The violence against this animal, however, somehow transfers to Julia, who slumps forward, her forehead bloodied, echoing a prior incident in which Julia is rendered unconscious and bloodied when a hunter shoots a nearby deer—the event that seems to have caused Julia's paralysis in the first place. Describing this moment in connection with the frontal orientation of the audience and stage in the final part of the

[36] Worthen, "Still Playing Games," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes*, 72.

[37] Ibid., 74.

performance, Worthen explains, "Much as we are returned to the auditorium in Part III, to assume the role of 'spectator' with a fuller sense of the social legitimacy embodied in that perspective, so Fefu finally appropriates the objectifying 'bias' of the unseen man in order to defend herself—and free Julia— from its oppressive view."[38] This subversion through appropriation resolves, if problematically (Julia is free, but she may also be dead), the matter of Julia's (perhaps) imagined enthrallment to masculine judges whom only she can see and hear. In the context of the feminist struggle that plays out in *Fefu,* the male gaze appears to have been subverted successfully. What remains troubling, however, is the persistence of *any* controlling gaze, patriarchal or otherwise. In this case, the frontal orientation of the stage again shapes the unifocal—in other words, landscape—perspective of the audience. In short, Fefu may not subvert the male gaze in the end as much as she simply assumes it, perpetuating the patriarchal and, therefore, hierarchical structure of the play.

Recall too that, coming at the end of Part III, Fefu's embrace of the landscape perspective follows almost immediately upon Emma's critical discourse about environment, drawn from the work of Emma Sheridan Fry. Within the context of the play, I have argued, this lecture becomes metatheatrical.[39] Following this metatheatrical shift, coupled with a return to the frontal staging of Part I and through it, in part, the objectifying gaze of the landscape model, the scene that unfolds in Part III plays before an audience altered by its plunge into the more immersive staging of Part II. But this alteration creates a landscape perspective. The return from the environmental staging of

[38] Ibid.

[39] See also Farfan, "Feminism, Metatheatricality, and *Mise-en-scène,*" in *Modern Drama*, 448.

Part II, connected with the ecofeminist ideology with which the play parries, gives the audience the opportunity to sense with greater acuity the distance between the subjective potential of Part II and the return to objectifying vision in Part III. *Fefu*, like several of Fornes' other plays, Worthen explains, "frame[s] 'realism' in an alienating, critical mise-en-scène that alters our reading of the performance and of the drama it sustains."[40] This "critical mise-en scène," achieved through the objectifying gaze of the spectator combined with the ecofeminist subtext of the play, defines the focus of the landscape genre.

Fefu and Her Friends' surprising, if subtle, third act *coup de théâtre* is only one of the factors that contribute to the play's inclusion in the landscape genre. Its powerful boundaries point to the persistence of framing and restriction that run through the play, and its treatment of the nonhuman as "natural" or "other" aligns with the language of landscape. Yet its examinations of environmental staging and, through it, feminist and ecocritical ideals remain the most compelling of the play's many elements. If there is any doubt, though, regarding the force of the unifocal perspective in the play, Fornes' more recent decision to create a version of the play that eliminates its environmental staging would seem to settle the debate.[41] *Fefu and Her Friends* relies on a controlling gaze more than it relies on perspectival juxtaposition to make its points.

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[40] Worthen, "Still Playing Games," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes*, 65.

[41]Robinson notes that "In 1996, Fornes created a one-set version of the play, eliminating the need for mobile spectators. She said that she made the change for practical reasons, to allow theaters to produce it for larger audiences. (The four scenes of the original second act require intimate playing spaces.)" He is, nonetheless, skeptical about this claim, adding, "But those who know of Fornes's aversion to theory might reasonably suspect a more devious motive: The new *Fefu* upsets nearly twenty years of criticism about the political and philosophical significance of her original, nonlinear structure. It is as if Fornes feared that her innovation—so exciting in its day— was turning duller and more conventional each time a critic told her what it meant." Robinson, "Introduction," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes,* 20.

It is somewhat ironic, of course, that environmental staging contributes to the alienation of the audience. Penny Farfan argues against Worthen's reading of *Fefu*, claiming that he underestimates the impact of the environmental experience and its resonance among audience members, and misconstrues the role in which the audience is actively cast in the play. She says, "spectators drawn deliberately into the world of the play are cast less as Julia's judges, as Worthen has argued, than as her confidants, the community she feels she needs to join with her in hallucinating if she is to avoid 'perishing' (44)."[42] What is problematic in Farfan's reading, however, is the notion that Worthen's analysis fails to account for this point. To the contrary, his critique hinges upon the notion that the audience has engaged both meaningfully and, moreover, *differently* with the scenes before them during the environmental portion of the play. Otherwise, they cannot palpably experience the impact of the shift back to frontal staging and its attendant critical perspective. Yet Farfan's criticism, and *Fefu and Her Friends* more broadly, do raise several important questions: to what degree and in what ways might environmental staging alter the relationships between spectators and the scenes they witness? Do audience members take on roles in the scene once they enter its space? And what are the implications of this transgression against the traditional divide between performance and spectatorial space? Finally, how is it that the collapse of these divisions does not signal, automatically, the elimination of environmentally staged plays from the landscape genre? I will address each of these questions further in the next section, but *Fefu* does offer a few tantalizing hints in response.

[42] Farfan, "Feminism, Metatheatricality, and *Mise-en-scène*," in *Modern Drama*, 449.

Part of what environmental performance so powerfully promises is the real expansion of the world of the play, the idea that the audience might indeed follow the characters beyond the walls or other edges of a scene and into the wider space of that world. The white rabbit Fefu shoots at the conclusion of the play, however, is a significant if subtle clue to the sort of ontological space within which *Fefu and Her Friends* operates. The unfortunate resident of Fefu's yard is irresistibly evocative of the tardy cottontail who acts as the impetus for Alice's adventures, but his untimely demise closes the possibility that the audience might be following him anywhere—not down the rabbit hole and not into some realm beyond the boundaries of the play or past the edges of its mise-en-scène.[43] Although Marc Robinson claims of *Fefu* that "Each scene is but a glimpse of a relationship, an illuminated aspect of a life, and so suggests a larger, denser world," as with other landscape plays, the remainder of this "larger, denser world" is inaccessible because it exists only conceptually, only as an imaginary.[44] This limitation stands in contrast with the conceit of ecology plays, which also indicate the presence of the larger outside world but do not foreclose upon the possibility of accessing that world, a matter I will take up in much greater depth in the next and final chapter. It also indicates that landscape plays can create boundaries in ways that extend well beyond the picture-frame proscenium.

Finally, Worthen's argument that *Fefu and Her Friends* returns, in the end, to a unifocal perspective facilitates the way I have been discussing the landscape gaze up to this point; but from here on, it will become increasingly difficult to reconcile the usual

[43] Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends*, 61.

[44] Robinson, "Introduction," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes,* 405-6

unifocality of landscape to the broader, multifocal view of which the environmental landscape genre must be capable if its productions are to play a significant role in an eco-canon. In his preface to *Despoiled Shore / Medeamaterial / Landscape with Argonauts*, Heiner Müller makes this provocative statement: "as in every landscape, the I in this segment of the text is collective."[45] When Worthen speaks of the unifocal gaze, he discusses the convention of realism, what he calls the "rhetoric of realism" that explicitly defines itself through the singular eye—if not the singular "I." This lacuna points to a distinction between the conventions of naturalism and realism, and those of landscape. I have argued before that while naturalism and realism attempt to conceal the distance between their statuses as modes of depiction and the objects and events they depict, landscape is a metatheatrical genre that works to reveal this distance, this rupture, highlighting in performance the false dichotomy through which humanity distinguishes itself from plants and other animals, the "natural" world. Might, then, landscape's critical, controlling gaze become even more powerful if and when it makes explicit its own pervasiveness—its own plurality? I will explore this and several other lingering environmental landscape questions in the next section.

In the end, though, *Fefu and Her Friends* proves to be as compelling and educational on the subject of ecofeminism and landscape—it is, after all, still an ecocritical, if not categorically ecological, piece—as it has been for over thirty years on the subject of feminism. As Elinor Fuchs concludes, Fornes' work offers "no easy resolutions," and in this, she is "a strict realist."[46] Her realism elsewhere, however, is rich

[45] Heiner Müller. *Hamletmachine and Other Texts For the Stage*, Carl Weber, trans. and ed. (New York: PAJ Publications, 1984), 126.

[46] Fuchs, "The View from the Stone," in *The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes*, 108.

and contradictory. The world of *Fefu* is one of gritty reality and heightened symbolism. Between these two realms, as with the works of Beckett and Maeterlinck, Fornes suspends the audience in the often difficult but, finally, rewarding space of self-awareness that pulls the veil from the theatrical experience even as it offers the chance to see with new, critical eyes. But unlike Maeterlinck and Beckett, Fornes invites the audience into her world to share, briefly, the space of her characters, to feel, as it were, the grass beneath our feet. She offers just a moment of immersion before sending us back out of the rabbit hole, back through the Looking-glass and into the realm of the distant watcher—but with newfound understanding. In the next section, I will turn to the recent production of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More,* which sustains this immersion throughout the entirety of its performance but reveals, in turn, the consequences of occupying a fictive space without inhabiting the world it portrays.

"Till Birnam Wood": Landscape Models and Model Landscapes in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*[47]

For the fifth time, I twisted through a dim maze, a pitch black series of angles that seemed to go left when they should go right, illuminated only by the tiniest of lights placed strategically in a few key corners. I thought for a moment of the "dark, carnival maze" of The Performance Group's *Makbeth,* wondering if Punchdrunk had executed a clever theater reference, a gesture indicative of the value of insider knowledge this production engenders.[48] I mused too that this maze revealed a great deal about the

[47] William Shakespeare, "Macbeth," in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Blakemore Evans and J.J.M Tobin, eds. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), V.v.

[48] Aronson, *History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*, 198.

director of *Sleep No More* Felix Barrett's approach to environmental theater relative to Richard Schechner's approach. The maze Brooks McNamara designed for The Performance Group's *Makbeth* was strewn with mirrors, information about the production and bits of theater history, a messy aesthetic evocative of Schechner's DIY, pull-the-audience-into-the-machine-and-let-the-workings-hang-out ethos.[49] Barrett's is the polar opposite: controlling, dark, haunting.

Everything I would see for the next three hours, from the mise-en-scène to the marketing strategy, is tightly controlled, monitored and regulated—the audience included. Rarely, if ever, do the seams of this production show, and certainly not intentionally if they do. This approach to theatermaking is indicative of Punchdrunk's overarching aesthetic. During an interview I conducted with Livi Vaughan and Beatrice Minns, who designed the piece along with Barrett, they recoil when I ask if they would every consider working outside, given the abundance of flora and a menagerie of traditional and outlandish, taxidermied fauna in this production. Vaughan responds, "even if it was outdoors, it would have to be in an environment that you could still control, say a completely open field […] or a forest, or a Manhattan street, but it would have to be only one other element… It's just all about language. Everything here has the same language and that's why it works, […] knowing that the book feels right and what's written inside of it is appropriate."[50] Control is the key to this play, and one key to understanding the ways in which it is, if counterintuitively, a landscape production even

[49] Ibid., 198.

[50] Beatrice Minns and Livi Vaughan, Personal Interview, March 30, 2012.

within the context of environmental and, more specifically, immersive staging. More about this in a moment.

Inside the maze, which Vaughan explains is a Punchdrunk fixture, a "decontamination room" there to make people feel "disorientated," to experience a definitive shift away from the world outside of The McKittrick Hotel's walls to the realm within, I found myself remembering my first trip into the maze when, as the darkness appeared impenetrable and a hint of the hijacked mish-mash of Bernard Hermann's film scores rose to crescendos in the small space, a friend, genuinely nervous, grabbed my hand and whispered, "don't let go, okay?"[51] There *is* something unsettling about the process of moving from the "real" world of a New York street into the depths of this club-cum-hotel-cum-haunted house-cum-Scottish-otherworld, as if we're trading not merely one context for another, but one temporal, metaphorical and spatial plane for another. Josephine Machon calls this particular kind of environmental performance "[i]mmersion as transportation," in which "the audience-participant is imaginatively and scenographically reoriented in another place, an otherworldly-world that requires navigation according to its own rules of logic"; true to form, I felt as if I were *elsewhere*.[52] I was rewarded at the end of the maze with a now-familiar jolt into the velvet draped Manderley bar, fashioned as a decadent speakeasy, where on this night I was soon sipping absinthe and awaiting my turn to enter the performance area beyond. When my card was called—audience members receive playing cards in lieu of tickets, which the cast use to call the play-goers to the elevator into the main playing area(s) in

[51] *Sleep No More* features music from Hermann's scores for *Fahrenheit 451, The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and *Mysterious Island,* and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and *Cape Fear*.

[52] Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance, 63.*

small groups—I shuffled into line, listened to the pre-elevator speech ("there is no talking inside this hotel…your experience is meant to be a solitary one"), and donned my compulsory bird-beaked, *Eyes Wide Shut*-esque mask.

Punchdrunk's masks are among the elements of the company's work noted most frequently by critics and audiences. White, with sharply sculpted ridges above the holes created for spectators' eyes and a protruding structure that appears to be a duck-bill at the mouth, the masks are stark and threatening.[53] Barrett describes them as central to the immersive structure of Punchdrunk's work:

> The masks create a sense of anonymity; they make the rest of the audience dissolve into generic, ghostly presences, so that each person can explore the space alone. They allow people to be more selfish and more voyeuristic than they might normally be. Hidden behind a fictional layer, they lose some of their inhibitions. It's an important part of the dreamlike world we are trying to create.[54]

Barrett privileges the independence of audience members as a means for them to experience, as directly and fully as possible, the worlds Punchdrunk creates; yet Barrett predicates this independence on the concealment of the individual identities of the audience members, erecting what is essentially a barrier between the audience and the world of the play with the hope that their dual status as both ghostly "characters" and spectators will encourage their direct engagement with the environments and other characters that comprise the performance. Punchdrunk stakes the immersive operation of its work on the idea that audience members who might, for instance, be reluctant to rifle through the drawers of the medical offices in the fifth floor asylum or to establish eye

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[53] Punchdrunk's masks debuted almost a decade ago in the same form (then handmade!) for the company's production of *Faust*.

[54] Felix Barrett quoted in Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, "An Interview," in *Emursive Presents Punchdrunk's* Sleep No More (program), 26 October 2011, 26.

contact with the performers, which the actors frequently interpret as express willingness on the part of audience members to take part in one-on-one interactions, will more willingly transgress the spatial and conceptual barriers between spectator and play if they are able to retain some level of personal, if not physical, distance between themselves and the fictive world.[55] Barrett explicates this division, saying, "Handing out the masks is like assigning seats in an auditorium. It establishes each individual as part of an audience, and creates a boundary between them and the action."[56] Even within an immersive performance structure, Punchdrunk maintains the essence, if not the physicality, of the traditional theater's separation between the audience and the play.

Barrett's explanation of audience experience in *Sleep No More* aligns with the experience of the landscape viewer. More specifically, Punchdrunk's masks function in ways similar to the Claude Glass, a landscape tool. In landscape performances, the audience member is privy to an idealized version of nature akin to the view of natural terrain reflected in the muted, framed image created by the Claude Glass. For frontal, stationary landscape performances, the audience member maintains a physical separation from the world of the play just as the landscape viewer atop, say, a hill sees a framed image of natural terrain from a fixed perspective at a distance from that terrain. But what of the landscape image when the viewer descends the hill and enters into the terrain she

[55] Over the course of several conversations with a member of the *Sleep No More* security team, I learned that some audience members have overstepped even Punchdrunk's boundaries for permissible, immersive interaction. On one occasion, the security team found a "guest" constructing a large "shrine" made from a number of key props and scenographic elements in a corner of the performance space; on another, the staff narrowly prevented an audience member from urinating on one of the fake pine trees in the ballroom, as if he were in a forest.

[56] Felix Barrett quoted in Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, "An Interview," in *Emursive Presents Punchdrunk's* Sleep No More*,* 26. This claim is somewhat confusing in light of Barrett's later declaration that, "If ever an audience becomes aware of themselves as audience, then we've probably slightly failed." Barrett quoted in Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*, 161.

just viewed as landscape? And what of the status of that terrain? Arguably, the viewer may enter the space of the terrain, but the image of that land the viewer retains may be powerfully and even permanently altered by the Claude Glass. The land itself remains physically unaltered until or unless the viewer elects to change the terrain—to "landscape" it—so that it conforms to the image offered by the Claude Glass.[57] Put another way, the landscape viewer may, from his or her perspective, venture through the Looking-glass and into the idealized world of the landscape perspective. Barrett's description of the role of the audience in *Sleep No More* and the mechanism of the audience's interactions with the play point to the ways in which the audience member may be at once immersed within and divided from the world of the play, seeing and engaging with an idealized, carefully constructed, physically manifested "vision" of a natural world while maintaining a conceptual distance from that world. In other words, even the most extreme type of environmental performance, that of immersive theater, may also fulfill two of the fundamental features of landscape theater: distance and framing.

Punchdrunk's mask, then, acts as a kind of Claude Glass to position the audience outside of the performance; but beyond this, the mask also allows the same audience member access to the matrices of the performance's structure as depersonalized characters—specifically, ghostly birds. Avian imagery abounds in the McKittrick's halls, galleries and crevices.[58] It was during my initial visit to *Sleep No More* that I noticed the bird motif running through the performance. The feather-filled votives on each table in

[57] The alteration of land on estates in the English countryside stands as a testament to viewers' frequent impulses to engage in just this sort of "landscaping" activity.

[58] Beatrice Minns and Livi Vaughan, Personal Interview.

the Manderley bar were the first clues, followed by the taxidermied fowl above the bar. Then came the duck-billed masks and, on the piece's third floor, the back room of Malcolm's Private Investigation office, which is filled with bird carcasses, tools of haruspicy, the study of bird entrails to divine the future. Across the hall from his office is a small room with an incubator and a tiny graveyard for the birds Malcolm sacrifices to further his investigations. When I returned, during that first visit, to the front room of Malcolm's storefront, having explored his extensive collection of bird specimens, diagrams and photographs, I was met by an entire flock of bird-masked revenants gathered around a desk. Almost in unison, they raised their heads to watch as I joined the group, another dead bird among the hundreds haunting the play.

I realized then just how deeply the audience is integrated within the mise-en-scène of *Sleep No More.* In almost every scene, audience members serve as auxiliary characters, heads cocked in silent response to the events unfolding around them. We are witnesses, animals and ghosts, decorous extras in a burgeoning cast. From the masks we wear to the conceit that establishes the "McKittrick Hotel" as a site-specific, historical relic—all entirely fictional—this place, this story, this production and even we, the audience, aren't haunted exactly, we're doing the haunting.[59] This too bears out Barrett's vision for the audiences of Punchdrunks's work, albeit in apparent contradiction to his claim that the masks function as "seats in an auditorium" to distance audience members, at least conceptually, from the production.[60] Instead, he also claims, the audience is "put

[59] "The McKittrick Hotel" is, again, a reference to the hotel of the same name in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Hitchcock's *oeuvre*, represented through references to *Rebecca* and the ubiquitous selections of Bernard Hermann's scores for Hitchcock films, seem to haunt *Sleep No More.*

[60] Felix Barrett quoted in Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, "An Interview," in *Emursive Presents Punchdrunk's* Sleep No More, 26.

at the centre of the action; they're the pivot from which everything else spins. It's the creation of parallel theatrical universes within which audiences forget that they're an audience, and thus their status within the work shifts."[61] Yet together, these seemingly conflicting audience roles outline the ways in which landscape moves from vision to act, remolding the contours of the world in the process. As avian specters and spectators, we mark the relentless, pervasive presence of the landscape eye, the spectator, ever-present and perpetually responsible for shaping, through the power of observation, the form of the world that eye perceives.

In addition to framing the relationship between the audience, scenographic environment and performances within the play, *Sleep No More*'s masks also raise significant questions about the ways in which the piece presents and contextualizes nature, particularly through its resonance with the other bird imagery threaded throughout the production.[62] I'm struck by the relevant ecocriticism that seems to have slipped, if tacitly, into the production's narrative. We birds are useful, here to see, to bear witness, and, at moments, to act as tools to advance the play. It is telling that in so many of the private and much-coveted one-on-one encounters, the audience's masks are removed—mine have been in two of my three one-on-one experiences. It is as if, in order to re-enter the world of significance, the audience members gain selfhood only by briefly unmasking to meet the cast members as humans rather than in the guise of animals—dead animals at that. Both transitions signal a change in status from object to that of subject, an act both

[61] Barrett quoted in Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance,* 159.

[62] In almost—if not every—case, the imagery in question depicts dead birds, whether as corpses or ghosts—an experience evocative of Rachel Carson's investigation of "a great many dead birds and no live ones," victims of pollution via insecticide poisoning in her foundational ecocritical text *Silent Spring.* See Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), 90.

transgressive and transcendent. When I raise these issues with Vaughan and Minns, they are amused, to say the least. I'm certain by this time that all of the imagery *must* be interconnected and certainly intentional. Some is, as I discover, and some is not. The masks, as I mention earlier, are relics of earlier Punchdrunk productions.[63] But the other bird imagery—not to mention precisely researched spellcraft, including necromancy and tools of divination—is.

Natural imagery moves beyond these symbols as well. Hecate's extensive lair, for example, is marked within and without by winding branches, dead but growing, boring through the walls of her dilapidated speakeasy. These branches seem to emanate from her apothecary, itself strewn with the spoils of nature, its walls covered with "authentic" spellwork. The entire space is permeated by "Woodsy and flowery scents," including dirt and decay—pungent but not entirely unpleasant—emanating from "vegetation, drying herbs, soils, sands," alongside "trinkets and jars." Barrett explains that "Nature has this huge power within this play, this sense of destiny and nothing you can do to stop it. […] Natural force is very much in evidence in this space." Yet, he adds, "Things are collected, crafted and manipulated."[64] Manipulated indeed. *Sleep No More* is no ode to the raw power of unadulterated nature. Every aspect of "the natural" has been carefully constructed and presented—not ecology, but landscape. Again, almost paradoxically, it is

[63] Beatrice Minns and Livi Vaughan, Personal Interview. I was surprised—and, admittedly, skeptical—when Vaughan and Minns reported that the masks' birdlike appearance was unintentional, with the "bill" designed only to allow the spectator to breathe more easily through his or her mouth. The masks, they insist, appear only coincidentally to resemble birds. While this may have been true in prior productions, the meticulous arrangement of almost every other scenographic element of the play and, specifically, the ubiquity of birds throughout seems to challenge the notion that the appearance of the masks is purely accidental.

[64] Erik Piepenburg, "Stage Is Set. Ready for Your Part?" *New York Times.com.* March 16, 2011. Accessed September 24, 2011.

as if the audience has passed through the Looking-glass—the Claude Glass—to experience landscape from the inside. Barrett continues, describing Hecate's apothecary, "This is where all of the ingredients to many of the superstitions that are thrown around the space stem from. Many of the curses that are put on other characters and the charms that people wear to protect them from evil—all of them are created in this epicenter."[65] This room and her speakeasy are in many ways the nexus of Hecate's and, by extension, the entire piece's supernatural power. Within her thrall, nature has become super-nature and it is Hecate, a magical, humanoid being, who directs the fate of mankind just as, in the ballroom several floors below, she will seem to bring Birnam Wood to Dunsinane. Natural elements do not exert their own power independently, they are simply the tools Hecate both manipulates and uses to manipulate the entirety of *Sleep No More*'s world. Nature is again relegated to the role of the utilitarian or the beautiful—and often both simultaneously.

Barrett's claim that power resides in nature rather than in the play's primary supernatural being is curious not merely because he seems to ignore the ways in which the play perpetuates anthropocentric power structures, but because one of the most significant, albeit secret, moments of the play is itself a metatheatrical, explicit and seemingly reflexive gesture to the mechanisms of landscape thinking: a staged landscape. This portion of the play is not only one of the most literal landscape gestures to appear in the plays and productions I have discussed in the landscape genre, it provides the final element in the trio of characteristics that make a play a landscape play: framing and distancing, in conceptual if not physical senses, an anthropocentric treatment of "nature,"

[65] Erik Piepenburg, "Something Wicked Interactive Feature, Hecate's Apothecary," *NYTimes.com*.

and, finally, a metatheatrical awareness of itself and, to some degree, its practice of the first two landscape characteristics. I experienced this final characteristic of the landscape genre at *Sleep No* More during my fifth visit. I was there that night just for a refresher, I told myself, but I knew I was also there in pursuit of what I had come to believe was the holy grail of the production. I had read spoilers online, including one embedded within an early review of the piece, but had yet to win the lottery myself. Tonight, I hoped, would be the night.

When my audience group was ushered into the elevator that evening, I found myself at its front doors near to the operator who told us again that "fortune favors the bold." But on this night, unlike many others, he made eye contact with me, and I suspected I'd done it. When the doors opened, he shoved me out by myself, barring the exit of the others on the elevator. I knew I had reached the sixth floor. A quick note about the location of this mysterious level within the broader schematic of the McKittrick: You will not find this floor on any map of *Sleep No More's* territory. Most official reviews quash any mention of it. And with the exception of my conversation with Minns and Vaughan, no member of the cast or staff of *Sleep No More* has formally admitted this place's existence. Nevertheless, this is where I found myself on that fateful March evening.

Attempting to compose myself, I walked toward the only visible doorway and turned a corner down another hallway, empty but for a uniformed nurse I'm fairly certain I had encountered in the fifth floor asylum on previous visits. As I approached, she was standing behind a wooden wheelchair, circa 1930-something. She beckoned, and I tried to modulate my pace while silently reciting the mantra, "don't run, keep moving …

remember everything." As I sat, she placed her hands lightly on my shoulders, imploring me to relax. I lost a bit of giddy electricity and eased back into the chair. She wheeled me into another room, and I heard two doors close. Silence. Then, in a vertigo-inducing moment, the wheelchair tipped back so that I was lying flat, looking at the ceiling as the room went dark and filled with music. With the ceiling suddenly illuminated, a voice spoke the opening lines of Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, which is woven as a palimpsest through *Sleep No More*, "Last night, I dreamed I went to Manderley again…" and I began to see a tiny world laid out above me, a perfect landscape model of the Manderley estate growing from the ceiling.[66] When the chair began to roll, it was as if I was flying high above with the landscape below, and I had a new taste of the juxtapositions corporeality undergoes within this hotel's walls. As I seemed to hover, I picked out particular features in this miniaturized model of a world: diminutive trees, a large building, sweeping fields, the suggestion of water. I knew this was Manderley, but a part of me wondered if I wasn't also seeing some sort of map, both spatially and dramaturgically, for the production. When the lights rose again and the landscape above faded into shadow, I was led out of the small room and into a hallway. In front of the door that would lead me down to the fifth floor and familiar territory, the nurse whispered, "You can never return to Manderley again, but sometimes, in my dreams, I return to those strange days."[67]

Vaughan explains the landscape room saying, "It's like all of this is […] a snowglobe of this world and […] one person gets to see the overview of the whole world

[66] Daphne Du Maurier, *Rebecca* (New York: Harper, 2006), 1.

[67] Sarah Kaufman, "'Sleep No More': Part 'Macbeth,' part 'Hitchcock' and part haunted house," *The Washington Post, www.washingtonpost.com* April 23, 2011. Accessed: September 23, 2011.

and see where it all is in place and see yourself."[68] The "snowglobe," as Vaughan names it, is once more evocative of the image one glimpses in the Claude Glass. The tiny model of Manderley offers the few *Sleep No More* audience members who see it a sense of distance, of perspective that informs the world they enter after leaving the sixth floor. The sense I had upon descending into the lower floors of the performance space was of climbing down into the terrain I had just witnessed, but as the landscape viewer returns to a world transformed by the landscape perspective, I experienced the remainder of the play anew, at greater distance. The mise-en-scène now seemed, more fully than I had ever felt before, both landscaped and physically immediate—an awareness that had repercussions for the way in which I experienced the performance from that moment on.

After I left the sixth floor, I eventually made my way down to the fourth floor, the village of Gallow Green that houses, among other things, a taxidermy shop, Hecate's apothecary, a sweet shop, a speakeasy, and Hecate's bar, a decrepit reflection (another kind of mirror in an endlessly recursive, reiterative hall of mirrors) of the Manderley bar through which the audience enters the performance on the second floor. It was to Hecate's bar that I traveled next, drawn in part by thoughts of Du Maurier's description, through the eyes of the second Mrs. De Winter, of a Manderley overrun by nature turned wild in the opening pages of *Rebecca*:

> Nature had come into her own again and, little by little, in her stealthy, insidious way had encroached upon the drive with long, tenacious fingers. The woods, always a menace even in the past, had triumphed in the end. They crowded, dark and uncontrolled, to the borders of the drive. The beeches with white, naked limbs leaned close to one another, their branches intermingled in a strange embrace, making a vault above my head like the archway of a church. And there were other trees as well, trees that I did not recognize, squat oaks and tortured elms that straggled cheek by jowl with the beeches, and had thrust themselves out of the quiet

[68] Beatrice Minns and Livi Vaughan, Personal Interview.

> earth, along with monster shrubs and plants, none of which I remembered.[69]

The anthropomorphic and "menac[ing]" vision of nature ("her") that invades Mrs. De Winter's dreams through twisted limbs and monstrous proportions serves as an apt parallel to the "natural" chaos that Hecate commands, with nothing "natural" about any of it. As I note above, nature itself is not endowed with its own power in this play. Rather, Hecate wields nature like a weapon. The dead limbs that twist into the corner of Hecate's bar seem to extend outward from her adjoining apothecary and into a space that emerges as a dramaturgical control center for the entire play. Here, Vaughan explains in technical terms, Hecate pushes light and sound from instrument to instrument and speaker to speaker, shifting the perspective of the audience both visually and aurally.[70] Hecate's occasional, spasmodic gestures—a series of jerking movements in time with the ominous rise of an accelerating beat—mark her awareness, and, moreover, control of events unfolding simultaneously elsewhere in the McKittrick as she listens and watches not through physical eyes but through a broader, all-seeing consciousness. Supernaturally, she drives Macbeth's slide into betrayal and violence, which in turn drives the plot of *Macbeth* and with it *Sleep No More*. She is the authoritative and authorial watcher, composing the landscape scene. Hecate embodies the landscape perspective, and, with my recent invitation to the landscape room above, I was now privy to that perspective as well.

I arrived at Hecate's bar just in time to see both her performance of the distorted "Is That All There Is?" on the bar's stage and, shortly thereafter, the "orgy scene"

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[69] Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, 1.

[70] Beatrice Minns and Livi Vaughan, Personal Interview, March 30, 2012.

between the play's witches and Macbeth. As further demonstration of the extent of Hecate's influence throughout the hotel and the play, Vaughan notes that the witch's version of the song, sung with a male voice, runs concurrently with another rendition of the song, this time performed by the "boy-witch" in a female voice down in the McKittrick's lobby.[71] Moving one step beyond this, Vaughan also explicitly mentions that Hecate is "controlling the music" that, in turn, regulates every movement, every bit of timing and, consequently, every interaction throughout *Sleep No More.*[72] Furthermore, the lyrics of the song "Is That All There Is?"—in which the singer, underwhelmed by infernos and circuses, decides that life, devoid of meaning, is best spent wining and dancing—offer a useful introduction to the orgy that follows. I had always wondered about a particular moment at the conclusion of the orgy scene and on this night, meeting fortune everywhere I turned, I was positioned perfectly to resolve my question.

Based upon Act IV, Scene I of *Macbeth* and detailing the thane's encounter with the Weird Sisters, the orgy scene begins when Hecate's bar is flooded with techno-music, atypical of the rest of the play's musical score, and strobe lighting. The witches cavort, performing a series of sex acts—simulated and not—with one another and the mortals in the room and then enact a satanic birth/baptism of a baby(doll) in a font of blood before passing a small object to Macbeth at the scene's close. I had never been close enough to identify the object, but now I could see that it was a tiny model tree, identical to the trees pasted to the ceiling of the landscape room on the sixth floor and in accordance with a

[71] Beatrice Minns and Livi Vaughan, Personal Interview.

[72] Ibid. Vaughan's revelation regarding the role of music as regulator makes even more sense when one considers that the entire cast is comprised of dancers and that the whole piece is—even and often when it appears to be improvised—carefully choreographed.

similar moment in the play's text, in which the third, prophetic apparition Macbeth encounters among the Weird Sisters appears as a "Child crowned, with a tree in his hand." (IV.i.)[73] The recurrence of this image acts as a metatheatrical collision between the sense of distance offered by the landscape perspective of the sixth floor and a dizzying sense of proximity (and uncanny repetition) to the tiny tree. At that moment, I felt as if I was both in the play and far away from it. These senses of spatial and contextual dislocation too are bolstered by the exclusivity of access to the sixth floor: not only is the reference to landscape subtle, it is available only to those (very) few who have seen the landscape model.

Or so it seems. One other reference to the model occupies a significant position—or series of positions, as the case may be—within the scenography and dramaturgy of *Sleep No More*. For this, I traveled to the bottom floor of the McKittrick, which houses a large ballroom that functions at times as a banquet hall, a dancing space and Birnam Wood. The emergence of the wood, which the Weird Sisters famously warn Macbeth will mobilize at the moment of his undoing ("Fear not, till Birnam wood/Do come to Dunsinane"), is represented by some ten or twenty faux-pine trees positioned on rolling platforms.[74] The effect of Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane is created when actors push the trees around the space—in toward the audience and out toward the boundaries of the room, into a circle at some moments and a more random configuration at others. Several trees are strewn with fairy-lights while others remain dark. Despite the

[73] *Sleep No More*'s program summarizes this scene, saying, "The witches summon a series of apparitions that tell Macbeth of the future. These are an armoured head, a bloodied baby and a crowned child holding a tree. They then show him eight kings, the last with a mirror in his hand, followed by Banquo." "Synopsis" in *Emursive Presents Punchdrunk's* Sleep No More, 15.

[74] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.v.

enchanting effect of the scene, these firs troubled me from the moment I first saw them. Why, I wondered, in a mise-en-scène so meticulously and seamlessly rendered, are the platforms these trees sit on clearly, simply and, from my overstimulated perspective, reductively bare? It is as if, in the middle of the richest of naturalist performances, the stage's flies become visible, but just for a moment and seemingly without any relationship to the broader scenographic or dramaturgical framework of the remainder of the play. But as I watched a tiny tree pass from witch to murderer in the orgy scene staged in Hecate's bar, I noticed that this tiny model tree sat atop a stand. On the lower floor of the McKittrick, I felt as if I was standing *within* a replica of the model of Manderley itself—a copy of a copy—manifested in the form of the full-scale version of Birnam Wood that, in this pastiche of *Macbeth* and *Rebecca*, marks both the boundary of the Manderley model and through it, the ontological border of *Sleep No More*.[75]

This question of ontological status informs *Sleep No More*'s standing as a landscape play as well. The matter of location, both geographic and ontological, further separates the performance from the space beyond its doors. If the broadest boundary of the play is the McKittrick, a fictional, haunted hotel divided spatially and chronologically from the reality of present-day New York City, then where, precisely, *is* the play taking place? Vaughan muses, "Where is Manderley? Where we are now? It's the line between

[75] The dramaturgical and scenographic design of this effect struck me as so specific as to seem unquestionably intentional. Imagine my surprise, then, when I asked Minns and Vaughan whether there was any special motivation behind leaving the bases of the Birnam Wood trees exposed, and they answered that they had returned to New York to "refresh" the production's scenery, a task that included adding moss to the very bases that seemed to hold the key to identifying the "place" of this play. Following my proposal that the trees in the Manderley model and the tree that appears in Hecate's bar during the orgy scene replicate, in miniature, the larger "model" trees in Birnam Wood, however, both Vaughan and Minns seemed to change their minds about covering the bases of the Birnam Wood trees in moss in order to retain the connection between the three sets of trees, their respective rooms and the dramaturgical thread that binds them—and in my argument, the entire "landscape" of the play—together. Beatrice Minns and Livi Vaughan. Personal Interview.

New York and 'the world.' Where is the McKittrick Hotel? Is it on the street we're on in New York, or is it in Scotland? So this is […] a transitory space that has to […] work with both—and we're not saying it's one or the other."[76] Vaughan's and Minn's refusal to "locate" the McKittrick within a geographic grid points once more to the virtual essence of *Sleep No More.* The world of the play resembles, in abundant detail, what could be select portions of realistic space, but its most particular location is, in the words of Vaughan and Minns, a "snowglobe," or to return to the nomenclature of landscape, the realm that lies within the (Claudean) Looking-glass. W.B. Worthen explains this (dis)location in the context of the play's aesthetic patchwork, saying, "*Sleep No More* frames the 'dramatic' element of the performance as dependent on, derived from, the text; it is purely aesthetic, legible most clearly in relation to other artworks—*Macbeth, Rebecca, Vertigo*—and not, say, to the social life beyond its walls."[77] What the play's three-dimensional, immersive environment replicates then is not a particular space found in the world (or if one dares, the ecosystem) but the Manderley model, the meeting place of the many aesthetic influences that shape the play, already an idealized construct—the "authentic" reproduction of an imaginary place.[78]

For all of the emphasis Vaughan and Minns place on the importance of *Sleep No More*'s "super-real" environments—marked by vivid sights and reverberant sounds along

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[76] Ibid.

[77] W.B. Worthen, *Shakespeare Performance Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 166.

[78] One potential argument against this idea might be anchored in the Gallow Green section of the play's third floor. Named after the town center of Paisley in Scotland, Gallow Green pays homage to the so-called Paisley witches, five of whom were hanged on the green in the seventeenth century. The witches of *Sleep No More* also pay homage to the witches of Paisley, which in turn lends its name to the third floor Sweet Shoppe. The "town" of the play, however, bears no physical resemblance to its Scottish eponym. Beatrice Minns and Livi Vaughan, Personal Interview.

with sensory cues more distinctive to immersive work such as pungent smells and the haptic tingle of proprioceptive awareness—the language of seeming is threaded through their descriptions of the play's design.[79] The production is not, in the vernacular sense, reality but the simulation of reality. Worthen frames this simulation in textual terms, arguing that "for much of the 'immersive' performance [of *Sleep No More*] the audience performs its conventional theatrical role, overlooking scenes organized explicitly as scenes 'of' *Macbeth*."[80] The performance space, though richly appointed, is nonetheless situated specifically to open the dramatic narrative of Shakespeare's play to the audience—if with closer proximity than is typical of the stage. The play, in other words, is still the thing. So too, choreographer and co-director Maxine Doyle's insistence that the audience members of the play engage with "the action" of the production "as they would real life" belies the intricate regulation of the audience's movement through the halls and rooms of the McKittrick and engagement with the play's performers.[81] As Worthen aptly counters, "It's a little like life, but also like nothing else: it's theatre."[82] In the end, *Sleep No More* offers engagement only with a virtual world, a landscape.

Putting a particularly fine point on the play's virtual status, Punchdrunk has made recent forays into merging the physical, haptic space of *Sleep No More* with digital environments designed by a team from MIT. This interface uses "strategically placed Bluetooth and RFID [Radio Frequency Identification] sensors" within the physical space

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Worthen, *Shakespeare Performance Studies*, 164.

[81] Maxine Doyle quoted in Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, "An Interview," in *Emursive Presents Punchdrunk's* Sleep No More, 26.

[82] Worthen, *Shakespeare Performance Studies*, 179.

of the production to create "a new narrative-within-the-master-narrative for select participants."[83] These enhancements are "activated only with the help of a special mask" similarly "outfitted with sensors," allowing participants to log on from a remote computer.[84] Dave Itzkoff of the *New York Times*, briefly employed as a guinea pig for the development phase of this project, refers to the experience as "something like a living video game."[85] Wearing the enhanced mask, he was, in theory, able to engage with a number of effects triggered by his (or, rather, the mask's) presence in the room. Unbeknownst to him, however, another cyber-participant in the experiment was also witnessing his travels, mediated through the "eyes" of Itzkoff's mask and a computer screen.[86] This mysterious "other" participant also attempted to communicate with Itzkoff, sending him (unreceived) messages through a typewriter rigged, seemingly, to self-operate as the secondary audience member typed on his or her computer keyboard.[87] *Sleep No More* has entered the realm of cyberspace, yet another layer of virtuality.

Punchdrunk's decision to experiment with technology is no surprise—the infrastructure of the production is already fundamentally linked to sound and lighting technologies—but this particular kind of technological interface seems both different and

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[83] Dave Itzkoff, "A Guinea Pig's Night at the Theatre," *New York Times* May 22, 2012. http://theater.nytimes.com/2012/05/23/theater/sleep-no-more -enhanced-by-mit-media-lab.html. Accessed February 4, 2014.

[84] Ibid. See also Myrto Koumarianos and Cassandra Silver, "Dashing at a Nightmare: Haunting Macbeth in *Sleep No More,*" TDR 57:1 (Spring 2013), 167-75; and Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*, 62.

[85] Itzkoff, "A Guinea Pig's Night at the Theatre," *New York Times*.

[86] Itzkoff notes that Felix Barrett has also been using the interface from London, with a production member wearing the mask, because "The only way he can give his actors notes […] is to run the gauntlet himself." Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

surprising for several reasons. Although on the surface the possibility of adding another layer of interaction to the production promises increased engagement among an expanded group of participants, the fact that the secondary participant is largely unable to experience the haptic and, moreover, visceral elements of the play undercuts the multi-sensory scenography at the center of Punchdrunk's *oeuvre*. Instead, the remote participant encounters digital environments, which Janet H. Murray describes as inherently "procedural, participatory, spatial, and encyclopedic," noting that, "[t]he first two properties make up most of what we mean by the vaguely used word *interactive;* the remaining two properties help to make digital creations seem as responsive and extensive as the actual world, making up much of what we mean when we say that cyberspace is *immersive.*"[88] The term "immersive" alone, according to this definition, does not constitute unmediated interaction with an environment. Nevertheless, this kind of immersion seems a far cry from the deep, multi-sensory, multi-dimensional quality of *Sleep No More*'s physically encompassing mise-en-scène.

On the other hand, the fact that digital environments can be thought of as spatial, a phenomenon known as "*telepresence,*" may offer another way to understand the virtuality that I have argued defines the landscape orientation of the production.[89] Murray explains: "digital environments are characterized by their power to represent navigable space. Linear media such as books and films can portray space, either by verbal description or image, but only digital environments can present space that we can move

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[88] Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), 71.

[89] Gordon Calleja, *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 25 [emphasis in original]. Calleja explains that the term "*telepresence*" was "coined by Marvin Minsky (1980) in his paper "Telepresence." Here, Minsky describes how operating machinery remotely can lead to a sense of inhabiting the distant space."

through."[90] Murray speaks here of intangible spaces but, given the virtuality of landscape theater, even within the context of environmental and more specifically immersive staging, could haptic and digital environments occupy similar ground? Is this cyber-link, should it succeed, indicative of the powerful virtuality of the play—so virtual, in fact, that the audience member need not be physically present to experience the work? Arguably, *Sleep No More* would be difficult if not impossible to replicate within the proscenium frame, but Punchdrunk's foray into digital environments suggests that the play can be experienced through the frame of a computer screen, the Looking-glass of cyberspace.

From an ecocritical perspective, the digital interface once more demonstrates the power of the remote viewer over nature. Just as Hecate controls the action of the characters and mise-en-scène from her bar—whether directing Macbeth to betray and murder Duncan or perverting the behavior of other fauna, flora and even minerals to produce "Stones [that] have been known to move and trees to speak" and horses that "eat each other"—the cyber-participant controls the environment and, reciprocally, the behavior of the audience member who wears the digitally enhanced mask.[91] The implications of this cyber-control are compounded by the fact that the audience member who, knowingly or not, hosts the cyber-participant does so through a mask styled as a dead bird. Once more a "natural" entity is manipulated by a remote human, wielding "supernatural powers" (a moving book, a typewriter operated by unseen hands), this time through digital sensors and a web-based interface.

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[90] Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck,* 79.

[91] Shakespeare, *Macbeth* III.iv, II.iv. Guattari's inclusion of *machinic* ecology in his grand rendering of ecosystemic categories raises, however, potential questions about what does and will qualify as living environments for humans, particularly as virtual (i.e. cyber) realities occupy increasingly central positions in human lifestyles. See Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, trans. (New York: Continuum, 2008), 34.

"'Tis unnatural," the Old Man of *Macbeth* declares of Duncan's murder and "nature's" purported response. Yet there is little room for the power of nature to assert itself in either *Macbeth* or *Sleep No More*. Witches exert preternatural powers over the play's living inhabitants—human, animal and plant—and humans themselves drive the remainder of the action, even as the English army, cloaked in the branches of Birnam Wood, makes its strategic approach to Dunsinane. As Birnam Wood closes in, the natural world becomes a theater in which humans and, more accurately, all plants and animals are cast as anthropomorphic figures for the entertainment and utility of the supernatural. The privileged few, through special access to landscape perspective in the form of the Manderley model or the computer screen, share in this experience of theater in *Sleep No More.* The McKittrick's foggy rooms, the sweet aroma of Hecate's perfume, the shock of (unexpected) vodka on the tongue—in short, the multisensory abundance of the performance—all fade before the experiential distance produced by the persistent frame of the landscape paradigm. Though physically immersive, *Sleep No More* is nonetheless the depiction of an idealized world visible and accessible only within the closed confines of the landscape frame.

When my fifth visit to *Sleep No More* drew to a close and I found myself standing once more on the streets of the city, the images, the haptic encounters, the lingering sounds, tastes and smells of my time as a haunting and haunted guest of The McKittrick remained. But any similarity to the world of the play and the immediate, everyday reality of New York City began and ended with the material; both worlds are made of elements of the "natural" world, with its many dubious dichotomies, but the former is a twisted, artistically molded reflection of the world and the latter the world itself. On this night, in

counterpoint to my earlier visits to *Sleep No More,* I had seen something more—the frame and the mirror itself, writ small, as it were, in the Manderley model. I knew myself then as a landscape viewer, as an agent reifying the division between depiction and reality. Though I have returned to the McKittrick many times in my own memories and dreams, with apologies to Mrs. De Winter, after seeing Manderley, I can never return to *Sleep No More*'s halls and crevices, its deceptive immersion without being haunted by the specter of the landscape frame. Birnam Wood, it seems, will never leave Dunsinane.

Conclusion: "Which dreamed it?"

Upon Alice's return from the Looking-glass world, she begs of her kitten Dina, "Which dreamed it?"[92] The confusion of Carroll's heroine may be shared by the audience members of environmental landscape productions. Are they dreamers, wielding the power of the landscape gaze to authorize the fictive worlds through which they travel? Or are they dreamt, becoming landscape figures themselves as they wander a labyrinth of virtual environments forever guided by the imagination of a powerful, authorial force?

In different ways, Fornes' and Punchdrunk's works seem to answer, "both." When staged as an environmental production, *Fefu and Her Friends* pushes its audiences between alternating perspectives as it shifts from frontal to immersive staging and back again, as if Fornes is asking her viewers to see the world from new and different angles, to take on unfamiliar perspectives, both literal and figurative. In the end, audience members engage both with *Fefu*'s stages and environments, taking on the authority of the landscape gaze and the disorienting but luxuriant sense of engagement that attends immersive staging's many perspectives. The return, in the last act, of frontal performance

[92] Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, 231.

reasserts the inescapable authority of traditional—anthropocentric, misogynistic—perspective but not without the awareness that other perspectives are possible as well. This final transition further destabilizes both the traditional orientation of the theater and the entrenched ideologies that the play criticizes, revealing the persistent if powerful anthropocentricity of the unifocal gaze in order to examine the stability and potential unity of both feminist and ecological objectives.

Similarly, select participants who encounter the landscape model of Manderley on the sixth floor of The McKittrick Hotel are offered a privileged perspective of the world *Sleep No More* encompasses, as are cyber-participants who not only see but manipulate the space through which other audience members travel—an act of landscaping that alters the physical reality of those audience members who are, recall, cast as ghostly birds in the dramaturgical matrix of the play. The ground of this particular theater landscape remains, as in any landscape, the space of composition and, though less frequently accessible, the synthetic place that results. Worthen notes that "In its dynamic foregrounding of text, character, space, and audience," the elements of composition united with the viewer—who is, in this case, also a tool of composition—"*Sleep No More* opens a series of intertwined questions about the apparent emancipation of the spectator, the function of 'character,' and the character of 'cognition' offered by a theatrical 'immersion' in virtual experience, a surprisingly apt definition, it turns out, of the realist traditions of the modern stage."[93] The realist tradition Worthen names thrives just as well, it appears, in physically frameless spaces that nevertheless replicate the structural insularity, the illusion of totalizing, regulated experience the stage enframes. Add to these

[93] Worthen, *Shakespeare Performance Studies*, 110.

metatheatrical devices such as the Manderlay model, and all of the elements named here point to the inherent landscape structures of both *Sleep No More* and *Fefu and Her Friends*, through which audience members are implicated in the act of control—in this case of nature—that yields the "synthetic" environments J.B. Jackson claims define the very essence of landscape.[94] Landscape theater, even at its most immersive, pushes the audience member away from the ecosystem and into the space of relentlessly insular and perspectival illusion.

But must all theatrical environments be synthetic? And must all environmental and, moreover, all immersive productions feature the same kind of distancing frame? Is there, in other words, a way to use environmental staging to fulfill the goals of an ecology theater? In the context of *Sleep No More*'s landscape perspective, the image of Birnam Wood represents the literal and symbolic manipulation of flora, fauna or terrain. But does this image have to indicate human division from nature? In another context, might it instead demonstrate human participation in ecosystems and, more broadly, in the ecosphere? In the next chapter, I explore the potential for environmental performance to facilitate the work of the ecology theater genre in order to discover first if and then how theater may offer a form of engagement with—rather than a manipulation of—the ecosystem.

[94] J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 8.

Chapter Four

All the World as a Stage: Environmental Ecology Theater[1]

The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible.

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty[2]

This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in.

—William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*[3]

A skeletal metal framework, white fabric blowing from its corners, surrounds a make-shift stage. At the back of the platform is a squat *skênê* house, evocative of the early structures on the ancient Greek stage. But visible above this set piece, and through the metal bars so reminiscent of a proscenium frame, is Haft Tan Mountain, which would become stage and home to the performers of Robert Wilson's *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE* for the next 168 hours.[4] The most controversial production of the 1972 Shiraz Festival, *KA MOUNTAIN* began at the bottom of Haft Tan Mountain, rechristened "Ka" for the duration of the piece. Over the next seven days, 24 hours a day, the performance progressed up the mountain in stages, before it reached a (truly) fiery

[1] "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players […]." William Shakespeare, "As You Like It," in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Blakemore Evans and J.J.M Tobin, eds. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), II.vii.138-39.

[2] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith, trans. (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), xviii.

[3] Duke Senior in Shakespeare's "As You Like It," II.vii.135-37.

[4] Arnold Aronson calls the frame for *KA MOUNTAIN*'s Overture stage "proscenium-like." See Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 177; Photograph Captioned "On a Hill in Shiraz with Ka Mountain" Peter Cranston, "More a Way of Life," *The Tehran Journal* September 16, 1972, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000*, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 149, File 10, Columbia University, New York.

climax at the top. The image of this frame and the terrain beyond may be familiar at this point in the dissertation. The Theater at Dionysus, built into a hill, offered a kind of reverse perspective, looking out and down at an Athenian vista visible to its audience members. The proscenium frame of Chekhov's *The Seagull* offered a view onto a (usually painted) lake. But in both of these cases, the worlds beyond were scenery, inaccessible to their audience members. Haft Tan, playing the role of Ka Mountain, could be regarded as scenery as well. It did provide a grand spectacle of a set for the performance to explore, but it was something more as well. Over the seven days and seven nights of the production, the performers and audience members endured together, became enraptured together, moving in and out of the matrix of the performance into potentially dangerous territory, both literally and figuratively. Whereas *Sleep No More* invited its audiences through the Looking-glass and into a fantasy, a Looking-glass world of Claudean ideals, of faux reality, *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE* invited its audiences to step through the proscenium frame and out into the world.

The environmental ecology plays I examine in this final chapter were both staged outdoors as immersive, site-specific performances. Both, in other words, were specifically designed for the terrain they occupied—*KA MOUNTAIN* for Haft Tan Mountain, and *Across*, a 2000 Philadelphia Fringe Festival production by local theater company Big House (plays & spectacles), for Old City, Philadelphia. *KA MOUNTAIN*, performed by his company the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, was one of the rare pieces Wilson has ever directed outside of a theatrical space (a theater, loft turned theater, or gallery), a departure from his frequent reliance upon the physical frame of much, if not most, theater. Although *KA MOUNTAIN*'s audience members could come and go as they

chose, all had to endure the elements of the Iranian terrain and, more particularly, a progressive climb up the face of Haft Tan Mountain as the week progressed, situating performers and spectators alike in the center of a real, live ecosystem. *Across*—directed by Mark Lord, designed by Hiroshi Iwasaki, and which I dramaturged—was situated within an urban ecosystem familiar to many if not most of its audience members. These individuals were encouraged to take in the world, to observe their surroundings and to become increasingly aware of their own places within it. The production achieved this in part through the main character and audience surrogate "C," who had recently escaped lengthy imprisonment in a basement theater.[5] *Across* was the third part in Big House's "Way Out" trilogy, which progressed from a site-specific production of Beckett's *Texts for Nothing*—titled simply *Nothing* (1996) and staged at the Eastern State Penitentiary—to *Endgame* (1998)—mounted in the basement of a performance venue in Old City—to *Across*—the final movement from claustrophobic, incarcerating spaces to freedom. As C wandered through the city, he discovered green spaces alongside historic buildings, all while often unexpected "everyday" occurrences intersected with the play, not as intrusions from some "outer" world but simply as events that wove around and through the piece, even as the piece existed around and within the ecosystem of the neighborhood.

Immersive work, as I have noted, encompasses its audience in performance environments, diminishing—almost to the point of eliminating—the physical distance between audience and performance. Site-specific work, though often conflated with the more general term "environmental staging," involves more than offering audiences environments rather than stage images, although it may tie audiences more directly to the

[5] His identity was never explicitly revealed in *Across,* but "C" was shorthand for "Clov" of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*.

environments a production inhabits.[6] Instead, site-specific work is situated within a "found" space that gives particular context and, therefore, meaning to the performance. As I note earlier, for instance, staging a production of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, which deals with pollution, at the Merrick Theater near the site of the Merrimack River, the location of a deadly ecological disaster in the nineteenth century, held great meaning for the people of Lowell, Massachusetts.[7] But I argue as well that the impact of the play could be all the greater were it staged at the site of the disaster, the Merrimack River itself. This is an extreme example. Neither of the plays I explore here engage ecological catastrophe directly. Instead, they use site-specificity with the goal of creating a more direct and, theoretically, more meaningful connection between their audiences and the spaces and subjects they explore—evolution writ large in the case of *KA MOUNTAIN* and connection in the case of *Across*.

Staging immersive productions outdoors affects their potential as ecology plays in several ways. First, the engagement of the piece with the ecosystem is far more apparent out of doors—and more apparently within the ecosystem—than it is inside, let alone on a carefully manipulated stage.[8] Arnold Aronson observes, regarding naturalist staging, that

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[6] D.J. Hopkins explains that "The terms 'environmental' and 'site-specific,' often used haphazardly, are not synonymous. Though environmental performances can be staged in unconventional spaces, this is not necessarily the case. Generally, it is the province of site-specific theatre to seek out unconventional spaces and to respond to those elements that are inherent in a given location. Site-specific theatre need not be environmental; such performances often use a conventional (frontal) staging." See Hopkins, "Mapping the Placeless Place: Pedestrian Performance in the Urban Spaces of Los Angeles," *Modern Drama* 46:2 (Summer 2003), 270-1.

[7] Lynn Jacobson, "Green theatre: confessions of an eco-reporter," *Theatre* 8:11 (1992), 17.

[8] The immersive conditions of these performances are crucial. Aronson documents the fascination of the early 20th century avant-garde—from the Symbolists to the Futurists, Dadaists and Expressionists, among others—with staging work outdoors. But, Aronson notes, "the move into nature most often meant little more than the recreation of the stage structure in a park setting." Nevertheless, he argues, "part of the frame—the architecture of the theatre building—was eliminated so that nature itself became the frame, thereby incorporating the spectator rather than erecting a barrier." See Aronson, "Avant-Garde

"the so-called real world is replicated as closely as possible" meaning that "objects come to represent themselves so that the symbolically signifying space of the stage is mistaken for that which is signified."[9] In the case of outdoor, site-specific, immersive theater, the signifying space of the performance is, at least materially, the same as the space signified. But how much conceptual distance remains between these two iterations of the same ecosystem depends in part upon the performance frame of the play.

One type of performance common to both *KA MOUNTAIN* and *ACROSS* helps to diminish the distancing effect of their respective performance frames: moments of non-matrixed performance. Matrixed performance describes much of "traditional" theater.[10] The events of most plays are situated within matrices of plot, place and character to create a fictive world.[11] Non-matrixed work, however, moves beyond the fictional to merge with the everyday. Aronson explains, referring in part to *KA MOUNTAIN*, that "If one fully accepts the incorporation of daily life into the performance then all space encountered and all activities of each individual spectator might be considered an aspect of the performance."[12] In the case of *KA MOUNTAIN*, which lasted for days, it is possible that performers and audience members alike, organic creatures that they are, would have to attend to far more than just the creation and spectatorship of the play, at least in any conventional terms. Eating, sleeping, defecating—all are necessary "everyday" activities

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Scenography and the Frames of the Theatre," *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage*, Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 29-30, 32-33.

[9] Arnold Aronson, "The Symbolist Scenography of Arthur Miller," *Arthur Miller's America: Theater & Culture in a Time of Change*, Enoch Brater, ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 80.

[10] See Michael Kirby, "Happenings: An Introduction," *Happenings and Other Acts*, Mariellen R. Sandford, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 27-28.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*, 177.

that, in this case, would have become part of the fabric of the performance. All of these performance elements would also link the participants, themselves fauna, more directly to the ecosystem, both in general and specifically to Haft Tan (i.e. Ka) Mountain.

Across, however, was far shorter in duration than *KA MOUNTAIN.* Lasting typically only two hours, the piece seldom made rigorous physical requirements of its spectators, other than asking them to walk around a city on terrain seldom more treacherous than cobblestone. *Across,* however, involved non-matrixed performance not directly, through the particular actions of its audience members, but incidentally, through their reactions to the often unscripted, unplanned and uncontrollable presence of a very active urban environment in which both performance and audience were immersed. Yet given the production's expansive performance frame, explicitly geared toward inviting the audience to see aspects of the neighborhood and, moreover, the world they might normally miss, these non-matrixed moments often became indistinguishable from matrixed events. This was due in part to the shift in audience perception effected by both *KA MOUNTAIN* and *Across.*

"Deep ecology," Theresa May notes, "is the only branch of environmental thought that takes the phenomenological reciprocity inherent in the human relationship with the natural world as its point of departure."[13] This sense of reciprocity is again echoed in Bert States' application of phenomenal awareness to theater, not in juxtaposition but in complement to semiosis. States explains that "if we approach theater phenomenologically […] there is a sense in which signs, or certain kinds of signs, or

[13] Theresa May, "Re-Membering the Mountain: Grotowski's Deep Ecology," *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*, Gabrielle Giannachi and Nigel Stewart, eds. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 349.

signs in a certain stage of their life cycle, achieve their vitality—and in turn the vitality of theater—not simply by signifying the world but by being *of* it."[14] In immersive and site-specific theater, this mimetic collapse exists at an extreme. In the context of ecological work, the fact that *KA MOUNTAIN* and *Across* were also staged in the ecosystems they addressed seems almost to eliminate mimesis entirely.

Accounting for the kind of awareness audience members might adopt in the contexts of plays such as *KA MOUNTAIN* and *Across* requires a specific rubric of perception, one that moves away from the singular, authorizing perspective of landscape and into an understanding of environmental experience—including and particularly the performance environment—in terms of what Richard Schechner calls "a set of related transactions."[15] The psychologist James J. Gibson proposes a system for perceiving the world in terms similar to the "related transactions" that Schechner names. Gibson calls his transactions "affordances," a kind of mechanics of phenomenology. "The *affordances* of the environment," Gibson explains, "are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill. […] It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment."[16] He further situates this notion in ecological terms by describing ecological "niches" as the "setting[s] of environmental features that are suitable for an animal." He calls these niches "set[s] of affordances."[17] While this system of thinking

[14] Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 20.

[15] Richard Schechner, "Six Axioms for Environmental Theater," *Environmental Theater* (New York: Applause Books, 1994), xix.

[16] James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1986), 127.

[17] Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 128-29 [emphasis in original].

still risks anthropocentricity when applied to humans, its specific inclusion of non-human fauna is ecologically reassuring.[18] Moreover, the resonance of this system with the relational dynamic of environmental performance offers theater artists, critics and audiences language with which to discuss the precise structure of theatrical spectatorship that is predicated on far less hierarchical terms than, say, the Claudean lens of the landscape perspective.[19]

Yet, as Kaprow has noted, despite the depth of immersion or the expansiveness of the environment, there is still a spectatorial awareness invoked whenever one pays attention to something, including Happenings or other non-matrixed performances. Kaprow explains, "When you do life consciously[…], life becomes pretty strange—paying attention changes the thing attended to—so the Happenings were not nearly as lifelike as I had supposed they might be. But I learned something about life and 'life.'"[20] The same is just as, if not more, true for pieces that combine matrixed and nonmatrixed performance. This dichotomy returns to the matter of "life on the stage." Framing the depiction of life onstage, which can be topically productive to an ecology theater, as

[18] Gibson excludes flora from his general definition of environment, saying, "In this book, *environment* will refer to the surroundings of those organisms that perceive and behave, that is to say, animals. The environment of plants, organisms that lack sense organs and muscles, is not relevant in the study of perception and behavior." See Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception,* 7. His exclusion does make sense from a behavioral standpoint, but also signals the need for a more precise definition of "environment" to prevent plants from being relegated to the category of abiotic objects.

[19] See also Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 166. Baz Kershaw discusses the work of Tim Ingold in the context of the (re)formation of the spectator as part of the project of an ecology theater. See Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 305-306, 308. Ingold in turn draws upon Gibson's affordances to formulate the dynamic between agent and environment. Tim Ingold, "Culture and the Perception of the Environment," *Bush Base, Forest Far: Culture, Environment and Development*, E. Croll and D. Parkin ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 44.

[20] Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life,* Jeff Kelley, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003 [1993]), 195.

"real" or even "realistic" life from a formal perspective is not only a mimetic stretch, it is anti-ecological, ecomimesis gone too far.

Kaprow, however, resolves the problem of "life and 'life'" in an elegant and ecologically resonant fashion. **"**A new art/life genre therefore came about," he says of his work with Happenings, "reflecting equally the artificial aspects of everyday life and the lifelike qualities of created art."[21] Just as ecosystems encompass "natural" and "human" behavior—so much so that ecology does not recognize an inherent divide between humans and "nature," effectively erasing the distinction between the human and non-human nature names—so ecologically engaged art and, more specifically, ecology theater must acknowledge its own artistic status even as it works toward full awareness of the ecosystem and, accordingly, its own integration into the ecosystem. Put another way, the persistence of the performance frame does not necessarily make a production any less ecological. To the contrary, I argue that the performance's acknowledgment of its status as a piece of theater integrated into and affected by the ecosystem makes it all the more ecological. Moreover, for a theatrical performance to deny its status as a piece of theater would be, once more, to fall into the disingenuous claims of total visibility made by naturalism.

Both *KA MOUNTAIN* and *Across*, situated in distinct, richly engaged ecosystems, model Kaprow's art/life genre to ecological ends. Both also grapple with barriers to ecological immersion. While it re-situated the theatrical event within an ecosystem, *KA MOUNTAIN* was still, at least marginally, haunted by the specter of landscape. Some "synthetic" elements in the scenography—for instance, a number of cardboard cutouts—I

[21] Ibid., 195-96.

argue, merely enhanced the piece's awareness of itself as theater without detracting from the ecological force of the project. But the fact that strangers from strange lands came from afar to stare at, and out from, a mountain still raises the possibility that the Haft Tan acted merely as scenery for a piece of theater and not as a significant, encompassing presence unto itself. Nonetheless, the slip out of spectatorship and into participation many of the audience members experienced coupled with the unifying sense of shared experience the play engendered both resist, even if they do not entirely overcome, the force of landscape. Like *KA MOUNTAIN*, *Across* also encountered ecological risks. In blurring the line between art and ecosystem, what Kaprow would call "the blurring of art and life," *Across* risked overwhelming the presence of the ecosystem, potentially leading its audience to mistake human aesthetic creation for the world itself.[22] But at the end of *Across*, when Birnam Wood entered the streets of Philadelphia, it was to far different effect than its appearance in either *Macbeth* or in the context of environmental landscape theater in *Sleep No More.* Despite and often through these challenges, both *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE* and *Across* offered not merely glimpses of, but full, theatrical encounters with ecosystems. These performances rejected neither life nor art but, instead, began to forge paths toward mutual, ecologically responsible practices.[23]

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[22] From Kaprow's title, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life.*

[23] Josephine Machon argues that "The intention, form and impact of immersive theatre connects ideas around audience with ideas around space. In particular, the notion of encounter allows for an experiential interrogation of environmental concerns through performance across landscape [contextually, ecosystem] where an ecological sensibility exists within the very form of this work. Consequently, the immersive form can be seen to provide a bridge that links relational aesthetics with spatial aesthetics." Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 123. It is through the interconnected aesthetics in combination with social ecology that audience members may both connect with ecosystems through environmental ecology theater and, perhaps,

On the Slippery Slope: Ecology, Immersion and Spectacle in Robert Wilson's *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE*

The Old Man wanders an indistinct trail, negotiating the "sandy, rocky incline" of Haft Tan Mountain or "KA" mountain, as it has been known for the duration of the Shiraz Festival.[24] He has been climbing for seven days and almost seven nights, accompanied by some 60 performers and untold numbers of audience members, participants in what has become less a performance than a meditation, a communion.[25] The Old Man continues past a cardboard cutout of "New York City's polluted skyline" and on to the "artificially snow-capped summit" of his journey as the former bursts into flames.[26] Soon, his travels will end. Robert Wilson, the play's creator, described *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE* as, "a story about a family and some people changing."[27] Ossia Trilling, a reporter who frequented the performance throughout its seven day run called *KA MOUNTAIN,* "an idiosyncratic vision of the plight of mankind in the troubled world of today."[28] When the production's "Overture" was later produced in a gallery in France as a standalone performance, "Ouverture pour *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRRACE*," reviewer Louis Dandrel would call it, "a pre-history, in

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feel motivated to extend the shift in their respective mental ecologies to social action that protects and perpetuates the ecosystem.

[24] George Ashley letter on the activities of the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 178, Columbia University, New York.

[25] George Ashley, in a report to supporters of the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, counts "35 Byrds, 25 local performers and 16 children" among the performers. Ibid.

[26] Ossia Trilling. "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 223. Columbia University, New York.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

the paleontological sense; the world and mankind put back into some elemental state of being."[29] Each of these descriptions touches upon some crucial element of Wilson's epic vision. *KA MOUNTAIN* was ambitious in both subject, detailing the evolution of humanity in and out of step with the planet, and scope, calling performers and audience members into a wilderness that became, at least for a time, home. Together, they forged a distinct connection with the theater, the ecosystem and one another.

The piece advanced daily up the slopes of Haft Tan Mountain, with audience members "walking along pathways indicated by colored banners and painted rocks."[30] Much of the work was situated within the terrain of the mountain itself, and some moments of performance took place on scattered platforms.[31] Trilling describes the work as a "combin[ation of] the salient features of improvised playacting and action-painting with those of a planned 'Happening' and fully involved audience."[32] The piece's ability to engage its audience came in part from the necessity to manage the (literally) rocky terrain but also stemmed from the non-matrixed elements of the work, some drawing upon planned performance, others comprised of the demands of living—if that is the correct word, in this case—on a mountain for seven days, on and off.

Surprisingly, the stylized performances of *KA MOUNTAIN*'s actors, the hallmark of Wilson's direction, also contributed to this sense of connection. Basil Langton writes, "It seemed at first glance that the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds […] were trained to ***be***

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[29] Louis Dandrel "Prehistory in Twenty Four Hours" *Le Monde* November 16, 1972 Typed draft copy, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000*, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 179, Columbia University, New York.

[30] Ashley letter on the activities of the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, *The Wilson Papers*.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*.

the role and not ***perform*** it. Yet that couldn't be exactly true either. For nothing they did was ***natural***."[33] Although Langton uses the term "natural" as a reference to the stylized gestural work of the performers, which he refers to, along with the piece's "verbal and visual images," as "more often ***sur***-real than real," it is tempting to extract another meaning from the term as well.[34] Nothing the performers did, he notes, carries any sense of "being performed" despite the "super-natural un-reality" the mystical sense of the work suggested.[35] "Everything seemed merely to exist, in its own time," he explains, "its own shape, and its own dimension," as if it belonged to a distinct yet familiar world.[36]

The name Wilson chose for this world, "Ka," refers to an Iranian and Egyptian word for the soul.[37] Ka acted as an alternate identity for Haft Tan Mountain, which means "Seven Bodies," in homage to the seven Sufi poets interred at its base and as a reference to the seven hills that make up its terrain.[38] The deep significance of this place to the

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[33] Basil Langton. "Journey to Ka Mountain" *TDR*, June 1973, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 223, Columbia University, New York [emphasis in original].

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] When questioned about the origin of the term "Ka," Wilson is characteristically cagey, answering Trilling's "What is the meaning of Ka in your title?" with "I dunno." Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*.

[38] George Ashley letter on the activities of the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, *The Wilson Papers;* Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*. It is worth noting that *Orghast*, directed by Peter Brook with text by Ted Hughes and performed at the Shiraz Festival in 1971, the year prior to *KA MOUNTAIN*'s run, was also environmental, partially immersive, and staged in proximity to a mountain burial site—Naqsh-i-Rustam, a necropolis. Arnold Aronson explains that "The first part of the performance employed a relatively conventional arrangement of audience and stage. […] The second part of the performance —dawn at Naqsh-i-Rustam— took place in an open space at the base of the cliff in which are located the tombs of Darius II and Artaxerxes III. The space is about 80 by 300 yards. Part of the found environment here included some scaffolding erected by archaeologists around a temple and it was used by the performers. The spectators moved about the plain with the performers who descended from the cliff or came charging up behind the audience in a reenactment of the Persian defeat by the Greeks. At the conclusion a herdsman led a cow into the distance toward the rising sun. The spectators were thus fully incorporated into a performance space

Iranian people helped to galvanize the sense of meaning Wilson attached to the site, offering his own kind of spiritual essence to the place that he essentially renamed "soul" mountain. It is the mountain itself and, moreover, the direct connection to the mountain as an ecosystem which the piece offered that I hope to examine here, not in addition to or in tension with the cultural context Wilson both created through his audiences and performers, but through the union of human culture and the ecosystem.

In some ways, *KA MOUNTAIN* is a stark departure from Wilson's usual work, both before and after the 1972 Shiraz Festival. With carefully composed stage images ranging from sparse and desolate to unbearably lush, often within a single performance, Wilson's work has always revealed his "painter's eye."[39] His performers seem often to be quintessential landscape figures, almost like animate dolls as they hover across the stage, their movements stylized, precise and so lugubrious as to be almost glacial. His work, in other words, often resembles nothing so strongly as a landscape painting. *KA MOUNTAIN* too featured elements of Wilson's painterly disposition, with images composed of performers, live (and caged) animals, and cardboard cutouts populating the terrain of the work. But the broader context of the piece, its vast and permeable performance frame achieved in part through the use of found space—an entire mountain—and non-matrixed events that complemented and encompassed the highly

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that extended to the horizon." Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), 176. Ossia Trilling notes that while *Orghast* was impressive, in its scale, location and environmental performance elements, *KA MOUNTAIN*, "went further than anything Brook had conceived." Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*. Nevertheless, *Orghast* established that environmental and immersive work, performed for an extended duration, could yield compelling theater and, moreover, an engaging environmental experience in Iran's distinctive and, in these cases, both historical and sacred terrain.

[39] Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*.

stylized elements of Wilson's work altered the context of *KA MOUNTAIN*. Although some elements of landscape perspective and related anthropocentric attitudes—aesthetic spectacle, the ethically questionable use of live animals—threatened to undermine the potential for the piece's ecological engagement, in the main, Wilson's mise-en-scène was no longer a landscape; it had become fused with the ecosystem.

In part, the permeability of the performance frame I refer to above is due to *KA MOUNTAIN*'s site-specificity. Haft Tan acted as "found space," a location with its own meaning and function. But as Aronson explains, "there are very few performances that actually occur in a truly found environment—the given space is usually transformed in some way," as Haft Tan Mountain was in order to become Ka Mountain.[40] The mountain's transformation came not simply through the presence of the actors and audience members, but through a number of set pieces, including the New York City skyline I mention above, as well as other cardboard cut-outs, three dimensional structures, platforms and other alterations made directly to the terrain of the mountain, such as path markers and in one significant case, fake snow.[41] "But," Aronson concludes, "in all these cases the found environment […] predominated. The physical nature of the space remained basically unchanged, although the perception of it may have altered."[42] It is this perception of the space, as much as its physical orientation, that will help to determine the extent to which *KA MOUNTAIN* can be considered not only an environmental performance but an ecological one.

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[40] Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*, 166.

[41] Ibid., 166, 177. See also Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*.

[42] Ibid., 166.

The objects that Wilson and the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds added to Haft Tan Mountain in order to transform it into *KA MOUNTAIN* help to reveal both the "story" of the piece—one that is, ostensibly, about change, about evolution—and its formal relationship to the ecosystem. Part of this change is historical, referenced through two-dimensional cut-outs, some of which "moved slowly across the hillside," that depicted elements of ancient history including "Jonah's whale, Noah's ark, the Sphinx, the Acropolis with its Parthenon."[43] Still other elements appeared to be prehistoric or more directly ecosystemic, including dinosaur tracks complete with a large dinosaur, or mystical, such as a "graveyard with mythical inscriptions."[44] The loose narrative these images form tells of the traces of times, peoples and species past. The ecological resonance of these elements carried through into references to ecopathologies as well. Trilling recalls the moment when "The Old Man reaches a model of New York City and it bursts into flames. As it sparks and flares away to nothing, the shape of a pagoda is seen rising behind it: certainly one of the clearest images in the entire play."[45] As the play marks humanity's potentially destructive presence in the ecosystem, it also presents humans situated within the ecosystem, albeit in small, cardboard houses assembled to look like an "American 'suburb,'" many of which were inhabited by the performers. Trilling notes that inside of these makeshift homes, the actors "performed different allotted or self-chosen tasks—from simply sitting still as a statue to reading from texts,

[43] Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 93; Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*.

[44] Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*.

[45] Ibid.

often in a manner as to be quite incomprehensible."[46] Even the flimsy scenery of the play, in other words, offered opportunities to unite performance with terrain.

The piece's language, "incomprehensible" though it may have been, also points to the recurrence of an ecological theme. Trilling wonders, for instance, "What was the significance of the dinosaur's footprints dropped here and there along the procession to the summit?"[47] In addition to marking the deep ecological "prehistory" the play accesses, reference to dinosaurs becomes a matter of word-play that brings the piece to even more primordial levels of evolutionary investigation. Wilson incorporated a poem, whose fragmented language morphs into a series of homophones with more direct significance to the content of the play. This "poem" begins "THE DINA DYE KNEE THE DINA," transmuting to "DIEING DINA SORE SORE SORE" before settling into "DINASORE'S SORES SOWRDING."[48] Meaning emerges from fragmentation, as if language itself is a relic of the past. Here, Wilson turns back the evolution of communication, returning words to a state of primordial, atomized ooze that still, nevertheless, describes the world, including the fate of some of the perpetually dying dinosaurs of prehistory.

Just as compelling was the "Old Man" text the Byrds included in the program for *KA MOUNTAIN*, telling in slightly less fragmentary language than the dinosaur poem—marking the advance of time and, with it, the development of language—the story of the

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Handwritten "Poem" on Notebook Paper. Dated November 14, 1971, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 148 File 1 Notebook 2, Columbia University, New York. Wilson recalls a particularly lengthy question and answer session in Yugoslavia during which he responded to questions by saying, "the Dinosaur the dinosaur the dying dinosaur," which often trailed into "the dinadinnn." See Wilson in Typed Notes titled ""Body-Theater-Balinese Dancers," *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 178, Columbia University, New York.

Old Man whose appearances in the piece provided something of a through line, if not a plot, for the play. The text unfolds as a literary complement to the images and objects that portray the passage of time, introducing "The old man. The journey"—ostensibly that of the Old Man along with the audiences and performers—before identifying "The beginning of movement. The beginning of sound."[49] Soon, the "Globe of the world. Earth." become visible, followed by, "Winter. Burial." indicating, "the inevitable conclusion of all things."[50] The juxtaposition of the "White mountain" with the "Green garden" seems to recount the movement from the "Mourning House" of the "Overture" to Haft Tan itself.[51] This description becomes more explicit and, simultaneously, more metatheatrical when the text explains, "There are seven days. There are seven levels. Our friend [Wilson] in jail tells us ideas for the new piece."[52] The prose poem concludes as "Seven fires light the day dies dancing six times unto the last a seventh day, a SUNDAY, a SUN CITY, the old man, sip tea," echoing the end of the production, the week and the metaphorical period of evolution and creation.[53] The gestalt effect of the text is significant as a narrative overview of the piece's evolutionary subject, but the work's references to itself are also notable, particularly in resonance with the other synthetic, scenic elements Wilson introduces on the mountain.

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[49] *KA MOUNTAIN* Program at Shiraz Festival, interior pages, "The Old Man" text, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 150, Booklet 1*,* Columbia University, New York.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.; Wilson spent a month in a Greek prison for alleged possession of marijuana prior to his arrival in Shiraz. During that time, the production of the piece was delayed. Wilson, however, continued to provide ideas, images and text to the assembled members of the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds as they negotiated with Iranian officials to allow the production to continue as scheduled.

[53] Ibid.

At first glance, the cut-outs seem to be antithetical to an ecology theater, suggesting far more readily the flat, artificiality of landscape painting. But the cut-outs are ecologically productive in two ways. First, their subjects, as I have noted, point to relevant ecological issues including human history, evolutionary history through dinosaurs, floods, even atomized language as the building blocks of matter or, perhaps more specifically, genetic matter—and, crucially, their ongoing, indivisible overlap. The significance of polluted spaces, including the featured city skyline, also points back to the piece's engagement with planetary concerns. Second, they function as reminders to the audience that the play is aware of itself as a play. *KA MOUNTAIN* makes no attempt to subsume the ecosystem by claiming the terrain of Haft Tan as its own theatrical creation, or to conceal its own identity as a human creation.[54] Rather, it acknowledges its status as the product of human practice within the ecosystem, both conceptually and physically, and therefore occupies its own niche within the ecosystem.

Wilson further accentuated *KA MOUNTAIN*'s place within the ecosystem by extending the duration of the piece beyond the normally (relatively) brief few hours of stage time. Instead, the 168-hour run had to accommodate a good deal of "everyday" activity, both on the part of the performers and the audience. Aronson observes that, "the process of leaving the performance space, returning home, and then travelling back to a different or altered space became incorporated into the performance," causing *KA*

[54] There is a significant caveat to this statement. In its final, realized form, at least, *KA MOUNTAIN* made no attempt to subsume or substantially alter Haft Tan Mountain; but if Wilson had been given his way by the Iranian authorities, he would have blown up the peak of the mountain as the production's finale. I address this matter further in a moment. Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*. See also Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*, 177.

MOUNTAIN to "surround daily life in time."[55] He argues that "If one fully accepts the incorporation of daily life into the performance then all space encountered and all activities of each individual spectator might be considered an aspect of the performance."[56] From this perspective, every experience of every individual who traveled to and from, or remained on the mountain throughout the seven days of the play, became part of the play. It also stands to reason that the play itself—as Janet Lazarian, one of the spectators in question, claimed—could **"**be considered as a part of daily life."[57]

The presence of the everyday within the performance was particularly apparent in the activities of the performers. Trilling recalls that the "Fifty Houses," the small cardboard suburbia situated on the mountain, "were initially hollow on the bare mountain."[58] Eventually, however, each performer […] decorate[d] his own house during the course of the performance."[59] The performers created a kind of home for themselves on the mountain, fulfilling the role once more of the changing "family" Wilson set at the center of his project. The company reaffirmed this idea in the Shiraz Festival program, explaining that "The family and the people changing are not just

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[55] Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*, 177.

[56] Ibid. See also Richard Schechner in Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo and Schechner, *Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 28.

[57] Janet Lazarian, "A note about 'Robert Wilson,' The Man Family," *Khaneh Qawam*, Saturday, September 2, 1972, Translated by Faranak, Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds Private Copy, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 179, Columbia University, New York.

[58] Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*.

[59] Ibid.

characters to be seen on the platforms and the mountain. They are also us as we have worked to develop this piece."[60] But the performers alone do not constitute the family. As Peter Cranston, a faithful attendee and critic of the play observed, *KA MOUNTAIN* is "the story of a family and some people changing—the people being Wilson, the players and the audience"[61] And so, *KA MOUNTAIN* united a diverse group of individuals into what was, at least for the week, a family dwelling together in the same home, the same "*oikos*" within the context of performance, even as the broader context of the ecosystem encompassed the performance and the family alike.

Although many felt as if they became members of the "family" of *KA MOUNTAIN*, not every member—audience or performer—of the experience articulated a profound connection to the very literal ground of the piece. During a particularly contentious press conference at Pahlavi University, the company was asked why the performance was designed to be so physically difficult to access. Why, in other words, did the Byrds choose to stage a play on a mountain? One member answered, simply, "The mountain was there for the taking."[62] Additionally, one festival "enthusiast," when asked about the relevance of the piece and the experience of the mountain answered, "It's not supposed to mean anything. It's just there to be enjoyed."[63] Fair enough. But these

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[60] *KA MOUNTAIN* Program at Shiraz Festival, *The Wilson Papers*.

[61] Peter Cranston "Wilson's Quest for the 'spirit,'" *The Tehran Journal*, September 18, 1972, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 149, File 9, Columbia University, New York.

[62] M.K., "Baffling Debate," *Kayhan International.* September 9, 1972, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 149, File 20, Columbia University, New York.

[63] S. Bakhash, "Wanderings in Shiraz," *Kayhan International,* September 4, 1972, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 149, File 27, Columbia University, New York.

responses raise the specter of landscape once more, even in reference to an apparently ecologically invested production.

It is necessary to mention here that Wilson did not necessarily set out to make an ecologically resonant project. His practices—including locking up animals such as "a bear, a lion, various horses, donkeys, poultry, deer, goats and an elephant in uncomfortably small cages" during the "Overture" section of the production and proposing to blow up the peak of Haft Tan Mountain, the original plan for the finale—are far from ecologically or, for that matter, ethically or culturally responsible.[64] The performance of the "Ouverture" in Paris following the Shiraz Festival even featured the line, "ULTIMATELY, MAN IS NOW THE CRUCIAL MYSTERY, NOT PLANT OR ANIMAL"[65] At this point, the piece, also performed within the walls of a gallery space, may have become far more anthropocentric than ecological. Nevertheless, a significant amount of the work Wilson and the Byrds produced, at least on Haft Tan Mountain itself, is legible, with noted exceptions, as ecologically oriented.

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[64]Trilling explains, "On the final day of the seven-day pilgrimage, Wilson had planned to blow the mountaintop sky-high. At this, the Shiraz Festival authorities, who had proved unusually accommodating until then, drew the line." Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*. See also Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*, 177. The young elephant, at the very least, was reportedly borrowed from the nearby Shiraz Zoo, as per James Underwood, "Shiraz has come to life again," *The Tehran Journal.* September 4, 1972, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 149 File 27, Columbia University, New York.

[65] Paris Overture Script w. 24 hour breakdown [emphasis in original], *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 178, Columbia University, New York. Journalists who reviewed performances of the "Overture" both in Paris and New York City also noted that the piece seemed to suffer without its site-specific connection to the mountain. Among these: Deborah Jowitt. "Quiet please, A berry is breaking," *The Village Voice*, May 4, 1972, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 223, Columbia University, New York; Michael Smith, "Theatre Journal," *The Village Voice,* May 4, 1972, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 223, Columbia University, New York; Louis Dandrel "Prehistory in Twenty Four Hours" *Le Monde, The Wilson Papers*.

The problem of landscape and the landscape perspective, however, still stands. This issue lies at the core of almost any ecomimetic production, even and especially those located outdoors. The matter was potentially compounded in Shiraz by the unfamiliarity of the mountain for many of Wilson's audience members. The problem, in this case, is that the play risks slipping into simple spectacle, another image in the Claude Glass to be appreciated simply for its aesthetic qualities because "It's just there to be enjoyed."[66] Trilling offers significant insight into this problem along with a potential resolution. "After attending selected items of the continuous production at various hours round the clock," she recalls,

> at sunrise I was compensated for all the backbreaking ordeals entailed in keeping pace with Wilson and his imagination by the marvelous sight of the local working-class folk, children and nursing mothers with babes in arms among them, savouring for the first time in their lives, and free of admission charge, an enthralling, even when mystifying, theatrical adventure that was unique not only in their experience but also, because of this very circumstance, in mine.[67]

Trilling's transformative experience, shared with people of many different backgrounds, suddenly becomes less a moment of social privilege than an occasion for social unity, perhaps even a social ecology, focused not on corralling an ideal view of the performance or the world, but on sharing what is readily and exquisitely available to all. This does not forestall the potential for landscape readings—or the risk of entering into the anthropocentric thinking of landscape, as apparent in some of the moments I detail above—but it does offer an equally compelling ecological alternative.

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[66] Bakhash, "Wanderings in Shiraz," *Kayhan International, The Wilson Papers.*

[67] Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*.

If Trilling's experience is insufficient to drive back the potential for the emergence of landscape practices in *KA MOUNTAIN*, then the sheer scope of the piece offers another counterpoint. One of the key criteria for landscape is enclosure. Landscape is, in at least one of its incarnations, the sweep of land visible at a glance. In contrast to this, ecology theater presents the world as a whole, larger than what the eye can see. The very scope of ecology theater and, by extension, *KA MOUNTAIN*, in short, breaks the landscape frame. Cranston notes that, "No one, not even Wilson himself, saw the whole play, which raises the interesting question: was there a 'whole play' at all?"[68] Perhaps not. He adds, "'Ka Mountain' is an almost aggressively unfinished work," a characteristic that resists the framed, static spectacle of landscape. [69] Wilson, picking up on the same point argues, ". . . it's impossible to see the entire picture."[70]

None of this is to say that the visual and, moreover, the visually striking are inherently anti-ecological. To the contrary, *KA MOUNTAIN* was filled with visual splendor and even spectacle, but this was at the very least almost always accompanied by some other modality. Richard Schechner argues that what he calls the "overall body-demand" placed upon *KA MOUNTAIN's* audience members during much of the performance becomes one of the most significant aspects of the participatory experience. "[I]t's not important that a spectator see everything," he says, tacitly acknowledging the scope of the performance space and the impossibility of taking in the entirety of the experience, "but that she do the mountain climbing in order to see whatever it is she

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[68] Cranston, "More a way of life," *Tehran Journal, The Wilson Papers.*

[69] Peter Cranston, "The Festival in Retrospect" *The Tehran Journal* September 11, 1972, *The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 149 File 15, The Tehran Journal 8, Columbia University, New York.

[70] Trilling, "Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace*" *The Drama Review* June 1973, *The Wilson Papers*.

chooses to see."[71] And there was, if Wilson is right, always something more to see. Recalling the words of Emily at the conclusion of *Our Town*, Judith Searle reflects upon the way in which *KA MOUNTAIN* revealed to her a world once hidden in plain view. Even two months after her descent from Haft Tan, she marveled, "So all that was going on and we never noticed."[72] Searle was hardly alone in her response to the perception-altering power of Wilson's site-specific work.

Langton, who also described the performance as "a living organism" positively "alive" in its "authenticity," comments specifically upon the shift in awareness he underwent during his time as an audience-participant in the piece.[73] His vivid account of one moment from one of *KA MOUNTAIN*'s seven nights is worth exploring in detail:

> Sitting one night on ***Haft Tan*** mountain (the mountain that Wilson renamed Ka), waiting and watching for Wilson's drama to unfold, my attention began to wander. I looked up at the sky, studded with stars in an Arabian night, with an upside-down sickle of a moon and found myself thinking how very slowly the whole universe seemed to be moving. From where I sat the cosmos was silent and still. I looked out over the lights of the city of Shiraz and thought of all the bustle and activity of the streets that I could not see—a city filled with human activity. Yet, from where I sat, the city was silent and still. It was all relative.[74]

It would be easy to think of Langton's description as simply another example of anthropocentric privilege, relegating the firmament to the status of a celestial light show, just another instance of the "beauty of nature." But his next observation goes a long way toward undermining any such reading. The "bustle and activity" of Shiraz seemed "silent

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[71] Schechner in McNamara, Rojo and Schechner, *Theatres, Spaces, Environments*, 28.

[72] Judith Searle quoting Thornton Wilder, "How Long Does it Take to Peel a Red Onion?" *NYT, The Robert Wilson Papers 1969-2000,* Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 149 File 5, Columbia University, New York.

[73] Langton, "Journey to Ka Mountain" *TDR*, *The Wilson Papers* [emphasis in original].

[74] Ibid.

and still" from high upon Haft Tan, decentralizing the significance of humans. People, at least temporarily, had moved to the background.

Although it is tempting to read the traces of landscape perspective in Langton's enframing "from where I sat," it is clear that the perspective he gained through his time on Haft Tan, performing itself as Ka Mountain, had less to do with singularity or anthropocentricity than it had to do with the "relative," and only relative, significance of humans, whether inside or outside of the performance frame. Perhaps equally stunning is the realization that Langton's direct experience with the ecosystem came through the conduit of performance. While lost in his reverie, Langton is ostensibly "watching" a play, but one that intentionally decenters its own presence as part of the environmental experience.[75] *KA MOUNTAIN* instead offers a context, an occasion, a niche for an experience that might not otherwise be readily available or even imagined. In the process, it reveals the ability of theater, human-oriented though it is, to shift away from a necessarily anthropocentric orientation, even in formal contexts. These are the signs of environmental ecology theater at work.

KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE still stands as one of the most ambitious theatrical undertakings Wilson—or any theater artist, for that matter—has attempted. It is also, arguably, his greatest departure from the regulated precision of his well-framed stages. And while it occasionally veered into the realm of landscape—offering enhanced vistas of altered terrain *from* altered terrain—its incorporation of non-matrixed performance and, more particularly, everyday experience along with its indivisible connection to the site, the ecosystem of Haft Tan Mountain, individually and

[75] Ibid. Soon after, Langton returns his attention to the performers, only to realize that, despite its glacial progression, the world of the performance seems, suddenly, to have changed significantly.

collectively resist the distancing effects of landscape. If the threat of "natural" division reared its head during the 168 hours *of KA MOUNTAIN*, it was likely a gesture invoked by Wilson and his Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds themselves, a marker to indicate the play's awareness of itself as a play, though one working with and, even more, as a part of the ecosystem.

Yet *KA MOUNTAIN* was an *extra*ordinary event, one distinguishable from the "everyday" practices—human and otherwise—on and around Haft Tan Mountain. In the next section, I turn to *Across,* a piece that was performed in a specific site, in a particular urban ecosystem both with and for individuals—human and otherwise—who, in many cases, knew the site well: it was their home. Added to their familiarity is my own. I not only participated in the work as an audience member and, later, sometime critic, I helped to create the piece as well. Its story was, at least for a time, mine as well.

"Tonight, I am in the world": Inhabiting the Ecosystem in Big House (plays & spectacles) *Across*[76]

Stumbling along a cobblestone alley that gives way to concrete, a lone figure searches for one more glimpse of the Ben Franklin Bridge looming above Old City, Philadelphia. In a frayed coat and hat, like a Beckettian tramp, this character known only as "C" winds through the historic neighborhood, enchanted by the early September breeze, the crumbling brick of a centuries old façade and the sharp stare of a gray cat, oblivious all the while to the otherworldly figments populating his travels. In the

[76] Michelle Shafer, Dramaturgy Casebook for *Across,* Big House (plays & spectacles), 2000. Portions of this chapter originated in the conference paper "Found(ing) Space: The Performance of History in Big House (plays and spectacles) 2000 Production *Across*," presented at the 2008 ASTR and the 2009 ATHE Conferences.

background, fragments of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" drift through the scene, sometimes in C's otherwise silent voice, sometimes spoken by emerging figments. The sounds of the everyday world—a passing car, a shout from down the street, a barking dog—mix with Whitman's poetry as C continues on, wandering through the city with only the elusive, blue Ben Franklin as his guide, apparently deaf to the whispered thoughts of the figures haunting these historic streets. So began the immersive, site-specific performance *Across* by Big House (plays & spectacles).

The play unfolded as four groups of audience members each followed one of four incarnations of "C," played by four different actors, through streets haunted by over fifty performer-figments in as many scenes.[77] While the performance moved through historically charged areas including Elfreth's Alley, noted as the oldest continually inhabited street in America, and passed landmarks such as the Betsy Ross House along the way, the majority of the piece traveled the neighborhood's side streets, hidden corners and empty lots. *Across* was a play about hidden realities, the overwhelming and so often ignored immediacy of the world around us. *Across* was about awareness.

Mark Lord, the piece's director, first conceived of the idea for the play in 1999 when he attended a Fringe Festival production celebrating Philadelphia. To his dismay, the piece not only had little to do with Philly, it had been "rehears[ed] in New York" and was being performed "inside the four walls of the Painted Bride," a theater space in Old City Philadelphia. "If it's going to be Philadelphia," he recalls thinking, "it should be

[77] The division of the audience into small groups that experienced each "loop" of the piece in differing order and from varying locations recalls the environmental performance structure in the second act of Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends.* At the end of *Across*, as at the end of *Fefu*, the audience united into a single group, though to different result, thematically and ideologically, than at the conclusion of Fornes' play.

Philadelphia."[78] Frustrated, Lord left the theater mid-performance to take a walk through Old City. As he traveled, Lord noticed that "the streets were totally abandoned, which seemed very strange […]," particularly because there was "nothing to signify a festival; it [didn't] even really feel like a city." [79] But as Lord continued, he began to see the rich details of the neighborhood around him—hidden gardens, ancient-looking, metal-coated wooden shutters, an old loading dock, the distinct patterns in rocks—and knew that he felt far more connected here to the city being depicted on a stage a few blocks away than he had in the theater. Lord recalls "having the thought that the experience that I was having—of going on that walk, and being in that kind of reverie, and enjoying the night and the neighborhood and the multiple layers of history that are there—[could become a performance of and about Philadelphia]."[80] And so, *Across* emerged first as a piece about connecting with a city—with a specific space and with all of its hidden facets—performed within the city itself. In step with what would become the immersive, site-specificity of the project, the city's status as an urban ecosystem would soon emerge as well.

Urban ecologies are occasionally overlooked in conversations about the ecosystem. The theater theorist Wendy Arons writes, in an introduction to a "Special Section on Ecology" for *Theater Topics,* that "the urban environment in which most theatre scholars work, […] keeps environmental concerns at a geographical and conceptual distance."[81] This points to an odd, artificial divide between types of ecological

[78] Mark Lord, Personal Interview, November 18, 2011.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Wendy Arons, "Introduction to Special Section on 'Performance and Ecology,'" *Theatre Topics* 17:2

space, particularly because, in the main, urban environments are no less subject to the visible environmental problems that plague other kinds of space. To the contrary, those who live and work in cities often occupy front-row seats to ecological crises, writ large and small.[82] But to think of cities as ecological sites is, admittedly, somewhat counterintuitive, especially with all of the talk of the "synthetic" or the "humanmade" that has littered the pages of this dissertation. But these spaces are still parts of the ecosystem, still defined as habitat in the context of human (still fauna) life and living. Nor are cities home solely to humans and their creations. Animals—wild and domesticated—dwell alongside plants (whether "landscaped" or "naturally" occurring) and animals of the human variety. All of these elements are present in abundance in Old City, as in almost any other city space.

A significant part of any city's ecosystem is its own materially encoded historical record—found in abundance in Old City. And especially in cities, the historic record is written and rewritten in architecture over time. Andreas Huyssen elaborates, saying, "Cities, after all, are palimpsests of history, incarnations of time in stone, sites of memory extending both in time and space."[83] The layers of history written in the architecture of Old City reveal the shifting role of the neighborhood over time, with its earliest moments engraved in brick and cobblestone to its more contemporary manifestations in steel and concrete. These strata bleed into and through one another. Here, a wall is still marked by

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(September 2007), 93.

[82] I am thinking particularly of pollution but also of the problems that have plagued, for instance, New York through several active hurricane seasons and equally difficult winters. New York, moreover, stands to lose significant territory as water levels rise, including large chunks of lower and upper Manhattan.

[83] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 101.

the outline of a stairway from another structure, now absent; there, an old building wears a new façade like a thin mask, barely hiding its deeper architecture. And wound through all, the relentless presence of flora and fauna, surviving and thriving within and around humanity's dwellings, at least for now and at least in Old City. This experience defines the essence of immersive ecology theater in its quest to unite with the ecosystem not as an authorizing force but as an inhabitant of the ecosystem particular to site and occasion. The immersion opens the theater and its audience members to habitation within the ecosystem, whose history and form humans have helped to shape, for better and worse, and by which, in (eternal) return, they are co-created.[84]

Yet *Across* was also inspired by Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, a play set in a bunker after the putative death of nature and destruction of the ecosystem. Early in *Endgame,* Hamm, the blind, paralytic despot, declares, "Nature has forgotten us," to which Clov, his servant and, eventually, sole companion, responds, "There's no more nature."[85] A Philadelphia theater critic Eils Lotozo described "C," the piece's main character, as looking as if he had "escaped from the internally focused, claustrophobic world of a Beckett play and [was] encountering the world for the first time."[86] Lotozo's observation was insightful: C was in fact inspired by the character Clov from Beckett's *Endgame*—Clov who may or may not escape from the apocalyptic bunker he shares with

[84] Given the presence of ecological crisis, I hesitate to call the reciprocity of the relationships between humans and the ecosystem—or the existence of humans or the ecosystem—"eternal."

[85] Samuel Beckett, "Endgame," *Endgame & Act Without Words* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), 15.

[86] In this sense, *Across* is a fantasy about finding "The Way Out," a phrase Lord would eventually use to describe the trilogy of Big House productions formed by *Nothing* (1996), a Beckett-inspired, site-specific work staged at the Eastern State Penitentiary, followed by *Endgame* (1998), staged in the bunker-like basement of the Smoke performance space in Old City, and ending with *Across*, perhaps Clov's dream, perhaps his unwritten future.

Hamm, Nagg, Nell and a (probably dead) rat at the close of Beckett's play. Notably, *Endgame* had been Big House's previous production at the Fringe Festival. In addition to providing a dramaturgical myth for the character and the play, the idea that C was a sort of Beckettian or Pirandellian character newly escaped from the confines of the stage and loose in the world allowed C to act as a surrogate for the audience; in time, his discoveries became their discoveries and more. The world C encounters beyond *Endgame*'s bunker is one of amazement, shockingly verdant, vibrant and sensorily overwhelming.

The text Lord chose for *Across* echoed both the sense of wonder and ecological engagement that moved C along Old City's streets. Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," from the canonical piece of nature writing *Leaves of Grass*, offered narration for C's experience—sometimes coming from C himself, sometimes spoken by the figments who emerged around him. Whitman's transcendent poetry celebrates the world and, specifically, the ecosystem on scales ranging from "the common air that bathes the globe," down to "a leaf" he claims as "the journey work of the stars."[87] Along with his adoration of the world, Whitman also declares a particularly egalitarian, almost ecological awareness, proclaiming, "I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms."[88] All of this exuberance becomes slightly less overpowering in the mouth of Beckett's character which, Lord notes, allows Whitman to "be ironic in places."[89] This irony never emerges more forcefully than when C,

[87] Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass*, Karen Karbiener, ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), 89, 97; Shafer, Dramaturgy Casebook for *Across.*

[88] Ibid.

[89] Lord, Personal Interview.

surrounded by figments that he alone cannot see, declares, "I accept Reality and dare not question it, / Materialism first and last imbuing. / Hurrah for positive science!"[90] C's selective blindness, reminiscent of the blind characters of the landscape genre, reveals the limitation of his gaze, the limitation of any individual who still blithely claims that his "eyes settle the land," as C does at a particularly broad vista.[91] The play itself resists this kind of landscape perspective, in part by revealing portions of the world to which C is blind.

The figments were just one manifestation of several types of haunting that permeated the play. Whitman's poem was combined with a series of back-stories that were inspired both by "Song of Myself" and Old City's histories, and generated by the company members to create the only semblance of a script for the production. Among these, the piece's program described a legend, invented by Big House, in which the dead periodically cross the Ben Franklin Bridge into Old City from Camden, New Jersey—notably, where Whitman is buried. On such occasions, these ghosts, *Across's* "figments," arrive seeking contact with the world, its inhabitants and one another before making their return. It is during one of these brief periods that C happens to wander through Old City, initially unaware of the figments surrounding him or the audience groups following behind.

This ghostly overlapping of worlds is, again, what de Certeau and Huyssen describe as a multi-layered spatial and historical "palimpsest" through which many

[90] Whitman, "Song of Myself," 200; Shafer, Dramaturgy Casebook for *Across*.

[91] Ibid.

versions of memory and history become simultaneously visible.[92] Palimpsests suggest a sense of the haunted wherein a faded history is still visible through the inscription of a new reality.[93] And while de Certeau writes, "There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits," adding, "Haunted places are the only ones people can live in," there are few places so vividly haunted as palimpsest-cities in which each succeeding generation inscribes its presence atop the traces of those who came before.[94] If it is true too, as de Certeau notes, that "The memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place," we then know that "the memorable" extends far beyond any notion of an objective or authorized historical context into a "subjectiv[e] …existence," that has life and presence.[95] It is appropriate, if not ironic, then, that the palpability of memory within discourses of both history and performance is often described through the metaphor of haunting.

The theater theorist Alice Rayner calls this process "ghosting," through which performers, like *Across*'s figments, " *un*forget … the presence of something absent, whether that be called a text or a character, history or the past."[96] It is particularly through theater that this process becomes possible because, as Rayner says, "Theatre is where ghosts best make their appearances and communities and individuals know that we live

[92] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Steven F. Rendall, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 109; Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 81.

[93] Lord also uses language similar to this to discuss the overlapping historical and architectural histories visible in Old City, but refers to them using the fine arts term "pentimento." Lord, Personal Interview.

[94] de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* 108.

[95] Ibid., 109.

[96] Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xvi [emphasis in original].

amid secrets that are hiding in plain sight."[97] The purpose of performance in *Across* was not to impart specific information about a verifiable past, but to indicate the omnipresence of the past and, more precisely, its lingering echoes. Site-specificity, in this case, was less a tool to reconstruct a history than to engage with its ongoing creation.

Yet Rayner is speaking primarily of conventional theaters, spaces designated for the sole purpose of performance. The transfer of the mechanisms of theater past the proscenium and out onto a space with its own uses and contexts, in effect its own life, compounds the results Rayner describes, further raising the stakes for theater that is already, as she puts it, "a ghostly place in which the living and the dead come together in a productive encounter."[98] The theater theorist Cathy Turner argues that both site and performance, in such cases, "find […] equilibrium in a reciprocal process of mutual haunting."[99] This mutual haunting correlates as well to the interplay between performance and ecosystem through the production's site-specificity. *Across*'s figments are, for instance, not just the ghosts of memory, speaking into the corporeal world; they are also unnoticed things, the corporeal essence of the mundane, the unseen and unheard, suddenly visible and speaking the language of the world.

In order to guide the audience toward this unseen world and, moreover, the vast sensory offerings of the spatially dispersed performance, *Across'*s program offered an entreaty from Lord asking them to "see what C sees and see what C doesn't see."[100] The

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[97] Ibid., xxx.

[98] Ibid., xiii.

[99] Cathy Turner, "Palimpsest or potential space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-specific Performance," *New Theatre Quarterly* 20:4 (2004), 384.

[100] Lord quoted in Eils Lotozo, "Samuel Beckett Meets Walt Whitman on the Streets of Old City," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 4 September 2000.

audience's immersion in the world of the play was designed to outstrip, again ironically, the authorizing view C appears to claim for himself. Without this irony, the audience itself would risk the replication of the landscape gaze, not simply noticing hidden details, but essentially authorizing their inclusion in the play.

Arguably, this might have occurred anyway, given the presence of non-matrixed events within the piece, mixed with what often seemed to be intentional events. Lord notes, "you might know if a cat belonged in the piece, but you might not know if the water cascading down the alley was an accident or supposed to be there."[101] But the ambiguity between intentionally included elements, such as cascading water or pieces of fruit hidden throughout the performance terrain, and elements of the everyday world, such as a gray cat who decided to make a significant cameo during at least one performance, created the kind of life/art dynamic Kaprow discovered through his Happenings. *Across* was, in this way, comprised not simply of a found, but like *KA MOUNTAIN*, an altered environment, albeit to a minor degree. Most of the piece used physical elements of the neighborhood that were already present, everyday objects and spaces such as buildings, streets, green spaces, stoops, piles of tires and bricks, and even an abandoned dishwasher. These objects functioned as reminders that Old City is an "everyday" space—a functioning, urban neighborhood at the eastern edge of Philadelphia's Center City.

It is in part C's blindness—or obliviousness—to a good deal of the action unfolding around him for much of the play that affords the audience the opportunity to see the entire neighborhood as something unfamiliar. This task, however, came as a

[101] Lord, Personal Interview.

challenge to audience members who were accustomed to imagining Old City either as a historical tourist site or simply as home. Many tourists and residents first saw only certain aspects of the neighborhood, which complicated their initial relationships with the performance. For the former group, the piece was difficult to access because much of the area the performance covered fell outside of the few historical sites identified by Philadelphia as important places to see, throwing into question the validity of seeing anything else; for the latter, prolonged familiarity with the space had caused the "everyday" neighborhood to fade from view. Both of these phenomena were problematic for a play whose success was contingent upon heightening the perceptual awareness of its audience.

But Whitman says of his expanded awareness of the world, combined with his acute sense of personal identity, that he is "Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it."[102] This oscillation between levels of awareness is evocative of Schechner's description of performance environments as "set[s] of related transactions" between the space, performance and participants.[103] Toby Zinman, reviewing for the *Philadelphia City Paper*, accordingly noted that *Across's* startling, almost omnipresent staging engendered a significant shift in audience awareness. She writes,

> We see them about 35 actors —standing high up on windowsills, lying in basement alleyways, blowing bubbles in trees, singing in parking lots, draped languorously across steps, peering through broken windows —and they speak portions of Whitman's poem to us […] [T]he cumulative effect is crucial: As audience member you begin to see everything as significant. Found moments. A real woman in a lighted window prunes a plant; [a]

[102] Whitman, "Song of Myself," 188; Shafer, Dramaturgy Casebook for *Across*.

[103] Schechner, *Environmental Theater*, xix.

> man is suddenly visible in his apartment: does he know we're here at his front door?[104]

That audience members were able to perceive even more than the character C further heightened the sense of awareness Zinman describes. And while it is hardly unusual for audiences to perceive or know more about the worlds of the characters they are watching than the characters themselves do, with *Across* the audience's sense of discovery was not directed at a fictional world put on display, but their own world and, for many, their very own neighborhood. As I will discuss in a moment, this semiotic shift subsequently changed much of the audience's awareness of the neighborhood in the long term.

After her experience with the piece, Zinman observed that "The city — both our familiar Philadelphia and Whitman's vision of 'some vast and ruined city' — [was] alive with contrasts," a change made visible through the overlay of the performance onto the neighborhood's sites.[105] It is also within this connection between theater and the everyday that theater like *Across*—ecological and environmental—frames the everyday to make the ecological even more visible. In other words, through its performance frame, the theater makes itself visible as a piece of art that exists within, as a part of if not synonymous with, the everyday world. Theater, in short, can occupy a niche in the ecosystem.

Equally compelling is Gus Widman's experience with the piece. After struggling initially with the awkwardness of being outside of a theater space, and feeling, even as an audience member, as if he were on display, Widman resolves to see the performance through. He says in his review of the production,

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[104] Toby Zinman, "Night Moves," *Philadelphia City Paper,* 7-14 September 2000.

[105] Ibid.

> I've made it this far; I want to be part of this art experience in a city that makes these opportunities possible, but I don't get it. *Then* C stops for this most excellently calm and alert gray cat who happens to be sitting on a stoop watching us pass, and something happens. Suddenly, I am part of this just because I want to be […] I've been through this part of town many times, but I have a renewed appreciation of the brick, the angular, sometimes leafy, streetlight. People seem to merge back into life from a video, and I feel sad to have dismissed them for a while. I am in the city and it is fresh, almost painfully new, as it seems to be for C.[106]

What C was able to indicate to the audience established a level of awareness extending beyond the authorized histories of the well-traveled tourists' trail, to prioritize the subtle, ongoing stories spread through both the main streets and back passages of the neighborhood. In this instance, the "story" of the cat was clearly improvisational, limiting its reproducibility but not its relevance.[107] Through C, the audience's awareness was heightened as well. And because C was often blind to the strange and wonderful figments whispering just inches away from him, audience members such as Widman were pushed to search for what might be hovering just outside of their usual spheres of awareness.

In the end, it is the lingering effect of this experience on the audience that is most revealing. Viewers such as Zinman and Widman often spoke about the ways in which *Across* altered their perceptions of Old City. Many audience members reported afterward that they could not walk through Old City without seeing figments "lying in basement alleyways, blowing bubbles in trees, singing in parking lots," almost as if these had become parts of the sites themselves.[108] Through its performance, *Across* effectively

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[106] Gus Widman, "Fringe Event Puts the City In Context," *Philadelphia Metro,* 19 September, 2000.

[107] Despite a good deal of coordination to make the project possible, the creative team was admittedly unable to block staging for any feline performers. They were, as Victoria Hunter might say, part of the "true site," making cameos if and when they felt like it. Victoria Hunter, "Embodying the Site: The Here and Now in Site-Specific Dance Performance," *New Theatre Quarterly* 21:4 (2005), 377.

[108] Zinman, "Night Moves."

wrote itself into the history and environment of Old City, forming yet another layer of the palimpsest through which the neighborhood is made visible, *Across*'s own niche. But the after-effects of the piece extended even further. A few days after the performance he attended, Widman reflected that "Wandering around in the audience, we too are caught up in the act of trying to discover, with C, a meaning, a story, an identity. Is that art imitating life, or the other way around?"[109] Later that weekend, he recalls, "I'm running in my little neighborhood, and I hear a leaf-blower. I feel alive and connected to the city."[110]

Widman, apparently, was not alone. When the play reached its conclusion, all four Cs met for the first time, perhaps to signal that C has finally found his place, and there, himself— or himselves—after all of his wanderings; or maybe, as Beckett describes in *Endgame*, C has "turn[ed] himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark."[111] A second later, all of the figments who manifested throughout the piece flooded a small brick street, rushing toward the audience in a final moment of undeniable, direct encounter, tree branches in hand. At this point, the figments were memory made visible, even corporeal, moving Birnam Wood toward the audience; they were both seen and seeing, visibly engaged with the elements of the ecosystem. Somewhere in the intensity of this moment lies the idea that this final gathering was the reason for an evening's worth of travel.

From this meeting emerged a renegotiation of the terms of performance between performer, performance space and audience, and, in the context of *Across*'s immersive

[109] Widman, "Fringe Event Puts the City In Context."

[110] Ibid.

[111] Beckett, *Endgame,* 70.

site-specificity, the urban ecosystem of Old City. Lord says, of pairing Beckett with Whitman, that the desire both writers have to "dissipate the self" seems divergent, but is in fact complementary. Of Whitman, Lord says, "he wants his self to be so big that it becomes everything [so that] he's nothing," something with which, Lord argues, Beckett could agree.[112] For Beckett, the self "[turns] in on itself until it's gone," something, Lord again claims, with which Whitman could agree.[113] Both result not in an overwhelming, controlling, authorizing sense of being that dominates the world, but one that exists through and, most significantly, with the world. It is also this, Lord argues, that C—or at this point, all of the Cs and the figments—bring to the audience, a "co-extensive" awareness of self and the world.[114] In ecological terms, this brings humans—audience members and performers—and, often, their works into harmony with the ecosystem. But what of Birnam Wood? In *Sleep No More*, it is a direct link to landscape, both conceptually and materially. In *Across*, humans (performers, figments) still moved the trees, and so the specter of landscape may still haunt the grounds of its performance despite its status as a site-specific, immersive play staged outdoors. But there was, crucially, movement. For the first time, something different was underway: the audience met the forest halfway, as co-inhabitants, as friends.

The sites the audience visited throughout *Across* were not the sole or even primary components of the neighborhood's architecture — though these places would be haunted in turn by the performance. Instead, the "place" of Old City on this night was constructed both from and by the performers and audience members themselves, in

[112] Lord, Personal Interview.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

unavoidable proximity, reaching across the spatial and conceptual gap traditionally estranging audience from performance by bringing the audience into a fully realized, environmental space, one extant long before and well after the performance began and ended—mental ecology, social ecology and environmental ecology come full circle.[115] In the end, one result of *Across's* site-specificity was not simply the revelation or even commemoration of the past nor the exploration of neglected terrain, but the creation of an experience that could be shared among everything participating in the performance on a given evening, from actors to audience members to cats to trees—and to dramaturgs, such as myself.

I first wrote the words that appear in the title of this section one evening not long before *Across* opened, just a jotted note that held a quiet rapture, "Tonight, I am in the world."[116] To this day, I don't know to whom this "I" refers, in whose voice I narrated the experience of standing on the streets of Philadelphia on that "mad naked summer night," one of so many spent exploring a familiar world made continually new. Perhaps it is the voice of C, once Clov, finally free of Hamm's dusty bunker-theater. Maybe it is the collective "I" of the audience, those out on the town, reticent or exuberant, who discovered a new world in the streets of Old City. Certainly, it is, at least in part, me. I have written of my experiences with *Sleep No More* that, upon seeing the world of the play as a landscape, I could never return fully to the immersive illusion it beautifully fosters. After *Across*, I never saw Old City the same way again either. This time, however, my transformed vision allowed me to experience the city more fully, more

[115] Félix Guattari. *The Three Ecologies*, Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, trans. (New York: Continuum, 2008), 41.

[116] Shafer, Dramaturgy Casebook for *Across.*

vibrantly, and, more importantly, to inhabit the city and its ecosystem more completely. In the course of a few hours, Philadelphia had changed, as it does in the course of any two-hour period—evolving, growing, unrelenting—and with it, so had I.

Conclusion: Theater Unbound

One afternoon as we were rehearsing *Across*, we headed onto the streets of Old City—the four C's, Mark Lord and I—to trace through C's route. It was a temperate summer day sometime in June, entirely pleasant, if maybe a little cloudy. We had, by then, become almost intuitively familiar with the nooks and crannies of the neighborhood, but every visit still yielded something new, some new niche of the world we were making through and within the world we were learning, a world we thought we already knew. About fifteen minutes into our trek, a light drizzle began. In moments, the drizzle was a downpour. In silent solidarity, we all looked to one another, shrugged in succession, and decided to carry on. We certainly couldn't have become any more drenched. What followed was an hour of liberated elation. Children in twos and threes we were, playing in the rain as we explored our everyday world, now a little raw, very real, and infinitely willing to reveal itself anew—an experience whose essence quickly wound its way into the immersive fabric of the play.[117]

Across and *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE* represent the potential for a formal ecology theater, one that engages directly with the ecosystems it represents. Neither play, however, is without ecological challenges. *KA MOUNTAIN* risks repeating the voyeuristic anthropocentricity of landscape by offering up Haft Tan Mountain as

[117] "Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark." Beckett, *Endgame*, 28.

scenery, a double of itself. *Across* hazards moving too deeply into the humanmade, mistaking its own creation for the totality of the ecosystem, the error of synecdoche tied up with ecomimesis. Both more broadly demonstrate the problems of ecomimesis, in which it is difficult not to see all of the ecosystemic elements of the world that each production incorporates as solely scenographic or performative, mimetic players in a scene. This pulls the world into the theatrical performance rather than situating the performance within the world, within the ecosystem. Yet, in both pieces, the inexorable pull of the "real" exerts itself time and time again. Non-matrixed aspects of the experience begin to mingle with the matrices of the performances until the ecosystem asserts itself as its own entity, surrounding and immersing the productions in question with its own inescapable presence. Basil Langton declared, after seeing portions of *KA MOUNTAIN,* "My life in the theater had been changed."[118] Gus Widman, upon seeing *Across*, revealed that his awareness of both his own life and environment had changed.[119] Both sorts of evolution must persist if the aims of ecology theater are to be fulfilled.

Shakespeare explains, through the words of his Duke Senior in the epigraph at the opening for this chapter, that the stage itself can furnish no greater tragedy, no greater woe than can the world itself. I would add that the stage can create no greater joy than can the world itself.[120] Shakespeare also tells us that in its final scene, mankind will conclude in oblivion, "sans everything."[121] The lights will fade, the curtain will close,

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[118] Langton, "Journey to Ka Mountain" *TDR*, *The Wilson Papers* [emphasis in original].

[119] Widman, "Fringe Event Puts the City In Context."

[120] Shakespeare, "As You Like It," II.vii.135-37.

[121] Ibid., II.vii.162-64. "Last scene of all, / That ends this strange eventful history, / Is second childishness and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

and that will be the end. What the environmental ecology theater I have explored here attempts to demonstrate is that theater is at its most deeply engaged with the world and with its audiences when it has no stage, no physical frame, and no curtain to close. Perhaps this is one lesson to be found on the streets and peaks, the fields and stoops of an environmental ecology theater: if we so choose, we might yet leave the stage and escape the final curtain altogether.

Conclusion:

The Way Out

I am neither a dope—nor a hope—dealer.
—Heiner Müller[1]

A proscenium frame transforms a lake into scenery. A cherry orchard disappears from a nineteenth century stage. Birnam Wood gathers around a group of spectators masked as birds. Sunlight fades on a mountainous environmental performance in Iran. A Beckettian tramp, newly escaped from an underground theater, marvels at the grass of a small field as he wanders among the inhabitants of a historical city. An ancient Athenian audience looks out across the terrain of the countryside that frames the stage of the Theater of Dionysus. Each of these moments marks an intersection between the theater and some version of the natural world.

Well over two thousand years ago, the ancient Greeks and Romans, our (Western) theatrical ancestors, began the long evolution that created an insular, virtual theater that shuts out the ecosystem in favor of a reflection, a phantasm of the world—and all by building a *skênê*. Today, we are told, the ecosystem is changing. From melting ice caps and dying species to rising water levels and chaotic weather, the earth's environment is undergoing a relentless transformation that threatens to make the planet an insular world and we inhabitants players, like Didi and Gogo, who cannot escape the scene—until, of course, the curtain falls. How rich would the irony of the ecocritical dilemma theater now faces be if, as Arnold Aronson theorizes, the same *skênê* that rose to accommodate a

[1] Heiner Müller, "19 Answers by Heiner Müller," *Hamletmachine and other texts for the stage*, Carl Weber, ed. (New York: PAJ Publications, 1994), 140.

door—a way *into* the stage—has, more than two millennia later, now trapped Didi and Gogo on "the Board" because they have a (stage) wall but no door?[2] Before we too become permanent inmates of an insular world, while we can still find "a way out of the environmental morass" we have placed ourselves "in," it is, theater ecocritics argue, time for artists, audiences, and theorists alike to imagine ways in which the theater might help us, like *Across*'s "C," to find a way out.[3]

This dissertation has explored the potential for the theater to reach out to an imperiled planet. Una Chaudhuri, who has made some of the most lasting and meaningful contributions to ecocritical theater maintains that "The theater, which has long supported humanism's tendency to obscure [the ecosystem's] power, can also become the site of its revelation."[4] Although widespread acceptance of climate change has only recently arrived in political and, more surprisingly, scientific corners, the subject of the environment's well-being and an attendant ecological awareness entered the humanities some years ago, first in practice, through nature writing, and only later through scholarship, particularly among literary critics. Theater, a latecomer to the ecocritical conversation, is no less a crucial participant.

Despite its potential—and the stakes of its formation—however, theorists have formulated neither a clear, discursive framework to shape an ecocritical theater, nor a methodology to deploy a consistent analysis within such a framework. In an attempt to

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[2] Arnold Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 55 ,63.

[3] Barry Commoner. *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 207-8.

[4] Una Chaudhuri, "'There Must Be A Lot of Fish in that Lake': Toward an Ecological Theater," *Theater* 25:1 (Spring/Summer 1994), 30. Here, Chaudhuri uses "humanist" interchangeably with "anthropocentric."

remedy this problem, I have defined two ecocritical genres designed to focus and clarify several key issues that shape the relationship, in its many and often troubled iterations, between the theater and the ecosystem: landscape theater and ecology theater, ideologically dialectical but materially connected approaches to the common ground of the planet. Landscape theater self-reflexively examines the ways in which the theater distances itself from the ecosystem through the aestheticizing process of depiction. It performs the false dichotomy of "nature," a concept that privileges humanity over its environment and all other living beings, but in turn acknowledges its own role in perpetuating this dichotomy through the conventions of framing and composition. In landscape theater, to borrow a phrase from Marshall McLuhan, "The medium is the message."[5] Ecology theater, based on Barry Commoner's First Law of Ecology, seeks connections between theater and the ecosystem both topically and formally.[6] The ecosystem is often a significant subject, or at least topic, in ecology plays and performances. Furthermore, ecology theater deliberately resists the depiction of the ecosystem away from—or by elements separate from—the ecosystem itself. The latter set of conditions for ecology theater make environmental performance and, more particularly, outdoor, site-specific, immersive staging a potentially more productive medium for ecology theater—relative to the stage—because outdoor, immersive work allows the ecosystem to perform as itself in ecological performances, which, in turn, limits both the physical and aesthetic distance between ecology theater and the ecosystem.

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[5] Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 12-13.

[6] Commoner's First Law of Ecology: Everything is Connected to Everything Else." *The Closing Circle*, 27.

Commoner claims that because "the environmental crisis is the result of the social mismanagement of the world's resources, then it can be resolved and man can survive in a humane condition when the social organization of man is brought into harmony with the ecosphere."[7] One barrier to this ecosystemic harmony, he notes, is the "air of unreality about the environmental crisis," the sense that the contents of ecological discourse are merely "*concepts*."[8] The immediate corporeality of the theater—itself a tool of social organization—particularly through outdoor, immersive staging, offers a potential avenue to making ideas about the environmental crisis legible as solid realities. Landscape theater, as I demonstrate, is also possible even in immersive contexts. In this case, however, the environments within which audiences become immersed are humanmade and synthetic—further evidence of the power of aesthetic depiction to replicate nature. Through the metatheatrical self-reflexivity of the landscape theater genre, this replication marks the "rupture" between insular theater and the ecosystem.[9] Immersive staging further reveals the complementary ecocritical aims of both landscape theater, which signals theater's distance from the ecosystem, and ecology theater, which demonstrates theater's potential for connection with the ecosystem.

If the critical ends and, moreover, the formal means of both landscape theater and ecology theater seem somewhat familiar, it is perhaps because both share characteristics with two of the most significant theatrical models of the twentieth century—the works of Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, respectively. These similarities have significant

[7] Ibid., 211.

[8] Ibid., 207 [emphasis in original].

[9] Here, I once more employ Chaudhuri's term "rupture" to describe the disconnection between particular theatrical conventions and nature. Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 55-56.

formal and social import for the theatrical landscape and ecology genres. Jean Rancière observes that, "According to the Brechtian paradigm, theatrical mediation makes [spectators] conscious of the social situation that gives rise to [a collective practice] and desirous of acting in order to transform it."[10] In this sense, landscape theater follows the aims of Brechtian theater through the *Verfremdungseffekt* both instantiate; this distancing effect has the ability to make audiences aware of their own disconnection with the ecosystem, as modeled by landscape theater's metatheatrical performance of its aestheticized rupture with the ecosystem.[11] Furthermore, Rancière explains, "According to Artaud's logic, [theater] makes [audience members] abandon their position as spectators; rather than being placed in front of a spectacle, they are surrounded by the performance, drawn into the circle of action that restores their collective energy."[12] Ecology theater strives for precisely this effect, particularly through immersive staging, in order to bring audiences into contact with the ecosystem, to allow them to feel the palpable connection between themselves and the world, which ecocritics such as Commoner hope will motivate humans to resist ecological disaster.

This comparison may be particularly apt when ecology theater is staged in its immersive form, given that the "sensual and imaginative engagement" of immersive

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[10] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator,* Gregory Eliott, trans. (New York: Verso, 2009), 9-10.

[11] Downing Cless compares Beckett's "hyper-separat[ion]" of the stage from "nature" in *Waiting for Godot* to Brecht's "theatrical alienation." Downing Cless, *Ecology and Environment in European Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 171. W.B. Worthen draws a parallel between the subtly concealed distancing effect of *Sleep No More*'s masks and Brecht's *Verfremdungseffeckt* saying, "*Sleep No More* also summons the aesthetic relations of theatrical realism, urging a fictional interpretive 'freedom' while concealing the work of two of its constitutive agents: the means of production behind the scene, and the reciprocal means of production behind the mask. As Brecht might have said, that's the realist theatre's closest approximation to the reproduction of social life: a prison in which the guards are barely visible, and in which we 'choose' to be cabined, cribbed, confined to a 'nature' we assent to, assent through, produce." See W.B. Worthen, *Shakespeare Performance Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 176.

[12] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 10.

staging has been characterized as a form of Artaudian performance.[13] Just as the Brechtian and Artaudian paradigms Rancière names form two aspects of a theater seeking social action—either through distant contemplation or direct engagement—so landscape theater and ecology theater are complementary aspects of an ecocritical theater. Moreover, the proximity of landscape theater and ecology theater to paradigms that are both familiar to and pervasive within theater and theory offer these ecocritical categories the potential to find broader audiences among artists, theatergoers and theorists.

What ecocriticism may reveal through the theater is the necessity for humanity to learn not to compete, not to exploit, but to perform with and within the ecosystem—the world to which humanity and its theater have always belonged, whether we acknowledge this reality or not. What the theater might teach us, in turn, about ecology are methods to revise and rehearse our connections with and within the ecosystem in the most productive ways possible. Moreover, what the theater and the ecosystem need of theater artists, audiences and critics is our willingness to see ourselves, our work, our art—the activities of just one species in the world, no more and no less—in the context of the ecosystem rather than the other way around. We are part of that system. And so we can still help to shape it, for good and for ill. As Timothy Morton, distinguishing between the anthropocentrism of "nature" and the inclusive context of the ecosystem, observes, "Ecology may be without nature. But it is not without us."[14] Not y*et*.

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[13] Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 30.

[14] Timothy Morton. *Ecology without Nature: rethinking environmental aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 205.

The role of the theater in revising human interaction with the ecosystem, however, is, at best, complex and, at worst, fraught. The same conventions that engender theater's aesthetic distance from the world, and its status as an artform—in essence, the conventions that comprise landscape theater—complicate ecology theater. In its Artaudian attempts to reach across the lip of the stage and beyond the theater's walls to connect audiences and itself with the world outside, ecology theater still faces the barrier of the performance frame. If, however, artists, critics and audiences can find a way to renegotiate theater's place in the world, particularly through immersive ecology performance, in essence, to reimagine theater as occupying a niche within the ecosystem, then perhaps the potential for an ecocritical theater that recognizes the illuminating potential of both a landscape theater and ecology theater may be possible. Even on such unstable aesthetic and, moreover, material ground, theater artists, critics and audiences might, together, find a way to shift the terrain of our ecocritical conversations and creations in order to shape for everyone— every species in every place—a more stable world.

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